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ABSTRACT

Designed as a comprehensive resource guide for educators, health-care professionals, and media librarians, this document contains information on 45 aging-related films which are humanistic in nature, i.e., films which recreate an individual's experience at a specific time and in a particular setting. The text is divided into five chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of aging: Symbolic Statements, Portraits of Aging, Intergenerational Relationships, Responses to Loss, and Life Review. Specific information given for each film includes: (1) a brief introduction which serves to orient users to the story and the filmmaker's style; (2) previewing notes and activities to prepare audiences for the film; (3) a detailed, but concise, summary; (4) a set of discussion questions; and (5) a sample worksheet for use in a particular class or program. After the major films are covered in each chapter, two charts are presented which relate to programming concerns: (1) Recommended Audiences, which is designed to help users select a representative sample of films on a particular topic or subject area suitable for a specific age group, i.e., pre-school through adult; and (2) Recommended Subject Areas, which identifies more than 20 subject areas and indicates which films include materials relevant to those areas. Also included for each chapter are lists of additional recommended films; 49 films are included in these sections. Each entry provides a brief summary of the film, some evaluative comments, suggested audiences, and possible uses. A listing of distributors' addresses and phone numbers appears at the end of the document. (JB)

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THE
GREAT CIRCLE
OF LIFE

A RESOURCE GUIDE TO HUMANISTIC FILMS ON AGING

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Robert E. Yahnke

1985

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To PAT

"It's the change. All revolving . . . . burials and births . . .
One linked to the other. The Great Circle of Life!" --
Maude, in *Harold and Maude*

Robert Yahnke
The General College
University of Minnesota

THE GREAT CIRCLE OF LIFE

INTRODUCTION

The Great Circle of Life: A Resource Guide to Humanistic Films on Aging is intended to be a comprehensive guide to the use of humanistic films on aging for health-care professionals, media librarians, and educators. I use the term humanistic in the title to help readers understand that I am restricting my selection of films to one of two general categories of films on aging. Those two categories are informational films and humanistic films. The first category of films presents particular concepts, theories, or developments in the field of aging for professionals in gerontology and other health-care-related fields. In such films information is presented abstractly, and the older person is treated as a part of a population. Meaning is provided through a clear explanation of ideas, often through the process of narration. Informational films rely heavily on the presence of experts, who appear on the screen to share their expertise with the audience, either commenting directly on the action portrayed in case studies or summarizing recent research, or presenting their point of view based on their specialized knowledge of a field of study. When the individual's experience is incorporated in such films, as in the case-study approach, it is used to illustrate the generalizations that are at the core of the film.

Humanistic films recreate the individual's experience at a specific time and in a particular setting. These films evoke the wholeness of human experience through their reliance on a visual language. In other words, viewers are not "told" the meaning of the films; they are "shown" the meaning through the visual information provided in the films' scenes. Viewers are confronted with the uninterpreted experience of older persons, who are characterized as recognizable, and yet unique, individuals; who engage in meaningful and complex relationships; and who face conflicts that arise from those relationships. Usually such films are presented in the form of fictional stories about older people, but some humanistic films are portraits of real people, whose experiences are testimony to the diversity of responses people make to their own aging. These films challenge viewers to become more sensitive to the complex problems older people experience and more understanding of the difficult choices older people face relating to health concerns, family relationships, and independent living.

At present, there is no comprehensive resource guide either to informational or humanistic films on aging. Many film distributors include resource guides on individual films available for purchase or rental, but the quality of these materials is often inconsistent, partly because they are intended to promote specific films. For this reason, The Great Circle of Life fills a significant gap in the literature of films on aging. Filmographies on aging-related films are available; for instance, About Aging (University of Southern California, 1979, rev. 1981) is the most comprehensive annotated filmography available, and it is an excellent reference tool for media librarians, educators, and gerontology professionals. However, only a small percentage of the films cited in the text are humanistic in content. Another drawback when consulting this filmography is that the annotations printed in the text were provided by distributors; naturally, they reflect the biases inherent in promotional literature. About Aging is an excellent starting point, but the annotations are not intended as critical appraisals of individual films. Since 1976 The Gerontologist has incorporated an audiovisual section, which has been an excellent source for reviews of recent films and videotapes. The reviews are written competently by a variety of reviewers representing diverse backgrounds, and reviewers often suggest possible utilization of particular audiovisuals. But because of limitations of space, reviewers aren't able to offer definitive critical appraisals or thorough evaluations.

This text is intended to be consulted by media librarians, educators, and health-care professionals as a reference tool and "used" as a handbook by elementary, secondary, and college educators; adult education specialists; nursing home inservice directors; directors and coordinators with aging-related volunteer agencies and senior citizen centers; gerontologists; aging-related agencies who sponsor film workshops; and religious organizations who use films for religious education. The structure of the text facilitates such use. The text is divided into five chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of humanistic films on aging: Symbolic Statements, Portraits of Aging, Intergenerational Relationships, Responses to Loss, and Life Review. Division of these chapters is made according to the following structure:

1) Each chapter includes a brief introduction that orients users to the main elements of the story, its major ideas, the filmmaker's style, and the film's structure.

2) Pre-viewing notes and activities follow, giving users some background information to share with audiences before showing the film as well as suggesting possible stategies for later discussion of the film's story or ideas.

3) A detailed, but concise summary is added, usually no longer than two pages, intended to improve the users' grasp of the visual medium and help them prepare their own response to the film. The summaries also may help users who have little time for pre-viewing a film before a particular program. Of course, they are not meant as a substitute for viewing the films beforehand.

4) A set of discussion questions follow, covering all aspects of the film's message. At least two "discussion starters" begin the set of questions so that users will have a starting point for discussion. But more detailed questions are added as they relate to the viewer's understanding of the characters, the conflicts characters experience, and the themes generated by the action of the film.

5) For most films a sample worksheet is added, its format lending itself to being copied ealily and used in a particular class or program. Sometimes two sample worksheets are included for films that offer a diverse set of responses. Users may choose to reproduce a particular worksheet or be inspired to develop their own based on the models provided.

Whatever use is made of these sections, the text should enhance the educational goals of teachers who want to incorporate aging studies in their curriculum and improve the quality of workshops and programs offered by professionals in the various aging-related fields. Films are utilized most effectively when discussion is planned carefully and becomes an integral part of the viewer's experience. This text is intended to meet that need.

After the major films are covered in each chapter, I add two charts related to programming concerns: the first, "Recommended Audiences" is intended to help users select a representative sample of films on a particular topic or subject area that will be suitable for a specific audience (pre-school through adult). Almost all of the films covered in this text are oriented toward a wide range of audiences (usually elementary through adult), rather than toward a narrow or focused audience (such as elementary or high school). Another chart on programming concerns is "Recommended Subject Areas," which identifies more than twenty subject areas, such as "ageism: dispel myths," "creativity and aging," "family relationships," "long-term health care," "minorities and aging," "rural aging," "stereotypes of aging," and "women's roles," and identifies which films include materials relevant to those subject areas. Subject areas are included when at least two films include materials relevant to that area. Often films may relate to ten or more of the subject areas.

At the end of each chapter I include a section of "Additional Recommended Films" to increase the users' knowledge of available films and to suggest possible combinations of films when planning programs. 49 films are covered in these sections. Each entry includes a brief summary of the film, some evaluative comments, suggested audiences, and possible uses for the film. A listing of distributor's addresses and phone numbers appears at the end of the text.

I hope this text will help audiovisual users improve their training and educational programs, inservices, workshops, and other related activities. If it becomes a useful tool, it will become ragged and dog-eared after a few years' use. That would be the highest compliment to pay to its author.

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COMPLETE LIST OF ALL FILMS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

LIST OF DISTRIBUTORS

THE GREAT CIRCLE OF LIFE:

A Resource Guide

to

Humanistic Films on Aging

CHAPTER ONE -- SYMBOLIC STATEMENTS

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1984

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CHAPTER ONE -- SYMBOLIC STATEMENTS

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SYMBOLIC STATEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Humanistic films on aging are capable of generating symbolic statements on the experience of old age through visual imagery and symbolism, unusual characterizations, and mysterious happenings. Films that incorporate symbolic statements contain visual magic; for example, inanimate objects may possess a life of their own, characters may be other than what they appear to be, interactions of characters may represent truths impossible to portray in a realistic film format. Often these films stimulate viewers to consider the complexity and diversity of experiences and relationships. Viewing life through the lens of fantasy and symbolism allows us to see through the mundane and the ordinary. Films that incorporate symbolic statements ask us to suspend our judgment and expectations of what is real or not real. When we grant ourselves the capacity to be surprised, we can be receptive for fresh insights on our own aging process.

Two of the films in this chapter, The Blessings of Love and The Giving Tree, are animated films, using simple line drawings that move on and off the screen, set against muted backgrounds. The passage of time is presented fluidly and elusively; sometimes we aren't sure how much or how little time has passed. Characters appear and disappear at the will of the animator. But the careful organization of scenes encourages viewers to identify with the animated characters and empathize with the characters' experiences. Although the animation does not recreate life using real actors and naturalistic settings, there is a universality and truth inherent in the characters and the problems they encounter.

When films in this chapter employ real actors in fully-developed settings, the filmmakers add special touches of fantasy and visual magic to put us in touch with our deepest feelings. Roundabout and Home for Christmas present young characters who experience some of the magic in life possible only in films that incorporate symbolic statements. The boy in Roundabout, for example, encounters a magical miniature carousel, what appears to be a wind-up toy; but early in the film viewers learn that the carousel is alive and that the owner is an old man who appreciates the boy's interest in the roundabout and who welcomes the companionship the boy offers. In Home for Christmas the filmmaker portrays the loneliness of an old man, alone at Christmas. But the filmmaker forces the audience to consider the reality of the man's loneliness by creating another character, a young boy, who also is the old man--in effect, a visual symbol of the old man's memory of his youth. In an incredible scene, the young man encounters the old man, and as we follow the conversation between them, we realize the filmmaker is representing visually the old man's interior monologue.

Other films in this chapter illustrate symbolism through the creation of characters who appear to be normal and true-to-life, but whose interaction within the film suggests a non-representational, or symbolic meaning. In The Antique Collector, for instance, we learn that a mysterious stranger has decided to visit a local flea market in order to purchase a human being, an old woman known affectionately as Grandma. His reason for wanting to "buy" her becomes the plot question of the film, and because the characters take the antique collector seriously, viewers are faced with some difficult questions regarding how much (or how little) we value the old in our society. Another mysterious stranger is The Wild Goose, an irascible disabled resident at a rural nursing home, who injects a spirit of liveliness and humor in an otherwise dull environment. This senior-power version of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest inspires audiences because it provides fresh insights on several stereotypical portrayals of older people. The darker side of symbolic statements is reflected in Weekend, a deceptively simple film about a family picnic. The last scene in that film is one of the most memorable in all humanistic films on aging, because the visual symbolism employed by the filmmaker is graphic and to the point: old people sitting apart from each other on a hillside, deserted and alone, looking like rows of tombstones in a country cemetery. Audiences always respond to the force of this visual symbolism.

Finally, symbolic statements are made in films that provide an introduction to the study of aging. The best example is the well-known Don't Count the Candles, filmed by the then Lord Snowden, who revealed the many fears associated with growing old by filming a representative sample of young, middle-aged, and older people trying to understand their own aging process. Lord Snowden employed several visual symbols--the carousel, the candle, the clock--to reinforce the diverse individual responses to aging.

INTRODUCTION

There are three main characters in The Antique Collector: Grandma, who owns an antique shop in a wharf-side development called "The Lost Flea Market"; a young boy, Tom, who spends time with Grandma "learning the trade"; and a well-dressed, mysterious stranger who enters their lives. The story being told could be mistaken at first glance for an old episode of The Twilight Zone: an ordinary person, the elderly shop owner, suddenly finds herself in another dimension of time and space, confronting her destiny alone. A collector of antiques, she finds herself the object of interest as an antique herself when a mysterious stranger arrives one morning.

This scenario would be recognizable by most audiences, especially if the filmmaker had told the story from the old woman's point of view. This film differs from science fiction in its reluctance to treat the theme with the complexity and honesty it deserves. The film expresses a serious theme, regarding our need to reevaluate our attitude toward the value of old people in a world that discards what it no longer finds useful. But the impact of this theme is undermined in two ways. First, the filmmaker allows one of the characters to explain the film's meaning rather than allowing that meaning to arise from the interaction of characters. Second, the primary point of view in the film is that of a twelve-year-old boy, who is not prepared to examine the subtleties of the antique collector's statements. All he can see is that Grandma is being taken away. The film never explores her feelings regarding her decision to leave with the antique collector, and we never gain a real sense of whether or not she is happy with that decision. Again, the primary limitation imposed is that we are given only one point of view, and it may be difficult for adult viewers to identify with the character of the young boy, who sees life in absolute terms.

Still, the film raises some important issues about our attitudes toward old people and identifies some of the needs they may feel are being unmet in their own lives. Many humanistic films make the point that old people contribute to our society as a whole and that they are infinite sources of wisdom to us all. But in this film the mysterious stranger, a collector of antiques, believes that old people are of such great value that they are worth collecting--even more than the rare and precious objects most collectors prize. This idea seems preposterous at first, perhaps because it conjures up ideas of human bondage or possible mistreatment of human beings. But the antique collector purports to treat the old people he collects as if they were the most precious commodities in the world. He takes care of all of their physical needs, and his "antiques" have a large, comfortable home to live in, a center for social interaction among their peers. Thus, despite its limitations of point of view and audience appeal, the film raises some thought-provoking questions on a symbolic level about the place of older people in society.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Tell your audience that the film addresses the ethical question, "Of what value are older people?" Ask members of your audience to consider this question by asking themselves what value our society typically places on older people. Perhaps your audience can make a brief list of these values. Answers may include, "the old are sources of wisdom and experience," "the old are good communicators," "the old have insights and perspectives on current events." Ask members of your audience to share their responses to your question.

2) Whatever their responses, ask them to consider this hypothetical question: "What if old people were so important or of such great value to us that they were treated with the utmost reverence and awe?" Then what would the basis of our relationship be to them? If older people were "treated with the utmost reverence and awe," how would we show it? Tell your audience that the film deals with this hypothetical question in a direct and concrete way.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. A young boy, Tom, and an old woman spend part of a typical morning together in a cluster of antique shops and boutiques known as the "Lost Flea Market." The old woman, known as "Grandma," owns one of the shops, and she is teaching the boy what she knows about the art of pricing antiques. In her shop she continues her lessons, until they are interrupted by a tall handsome stranger, who is interested in looking at some antique glass. He buys some and leaves, but Tom, who is suspicious of this mysterious stranger, follows him outside and is astonished when he sees the man deposit his purchase in the garbage.

2. The next day the stranger returns to "Grandma's," ostensibly to look at more cut glass. But by now we wonder if he has other motives. The two end up chatting amiably on her porch. The stranger appears to be more interested in Grandma than in her antiques. Tom watches from a distance. After he leaves, the boy confronts Grandma, asking her who that man was. When she says, "He's a collector," Tom demands to know what he collects. "Old people," she says. But Tom still questions the stranger's motives. Grandma insists, "He makes me feel good. He's interested in me. . . He wants to take care of me." Tom blurts out, "You mean he wants to buy you!"

3. The boy visits several other shops and tries to warn the owners that the mysterious stranger plans to take Grandma away. In one store the stranger

suddenly appears and confronts the people: "What's wrong with collecting people?" Everyone is startled. Tom asks him why he collects "very old people." The antique collector replies that although the objects he owns are rare and precious, they can't bring him the "rich experience, insight, and knowledge" old people can give him. He continues, making his position very clear:

> Old people have so much to offer--adventures, good common sense, unusual romances, dreams that may or may not have come true. They can tell me what is truly important during this life on earth. . . If we take the time to ask and to listen, the elderly are a never-ending source of wisdom.

The boy asks him what he does with the old people he collects. "I take care of them." But Tom is not satisfied with this answer, and he runs away.

4. The collector returns to "Grandma's" and makes his offer. He explains the level of care he will provide. He will buy her shop, and she will have a home with a beautiful room, the finest meals, and lovely clothes. She is touched. "It sounds so good." Standing just behind her, in the dark, the collector says, "It is good. You'll be my special grandma."

Later that night, we hear Tom pleading with Grandma, asking her to stay. She listens to his argument, but she doesn't change her mind.

The next day the collector's fine antique car arrives at the Market. Meanwhile, the boy is shown running toward the market to stop the collector from taking Grandma away. He sees the car at an intersection. Is Grandma inside? We can't tell. Tom runs on to the Market, but the shop is dark and the door is locked.

We see a large Victorian house, well maintained. From the outside looking in, we can see the collector talking with one of the old people. He goes to another room, and through the window we see him talking to Grandma. She appears to he happy. When he leaves, she looks out the window and smiles, a thoughtful expression on her face. The camera slowly pulls back.

--1980, Barr Films, 29 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. Were you comfortable with Grandma's decision to accept the antique collector's offer?

2. What did you like about the antique collector? Were you uncomfortable with him in any way?

II. The Boy, the Old Woman, and the Mysterious Stranger.

3. Did you notice any visual clues that helped you evaluate the antique collector's character?

4. To what extent are Grandma and the young boy, Tom, fully realized as characters? Are their characterizations stereotypical in any way?

5. To what extent was the relationship between Grandma and the young boy, Tom, believable?

6. What are some of the reasons Grandma felt attracted to the mysterious stranger, the antique collector?

III. The Old Woman and the Antique Collector.

7. In the scene where the antique collector explains to Grandma what he will do for her, we see her in the foreground, her face expressive, reacting to his words, and the collector behind her, his face in the shadows. What was your interpretation of this scene?

8. Were you comfortable with the antique collector's assurance that he would "take care" of Grandma?

9. What do you think the filmmaker was trying to communicate in the last scene in the film? Did you think Grandma was happy?

IV. Audience Response.

10. Who do you think is the intended audience for this film?

11. If you had been one of the shop owners, and had heard the antique collector's reasons for collecting old people (Scene 3), what would you have said? Would the later scene between the collector and Grandma in her shop have changed your mind in any way?

12. Consider the way in which a younger audience would view this film. What do you think they would say happens to Grandma at the end of the film? Would they think Grandma was happy? What would be their attitude toward the antique collector?

13. The distributor of the film maintains that it is "a film about the needs and values of the elderly in modern society." Do you agree?

14. Would the film have made its statement of theme about the value of the old by presenting the story primarily from the old woman's point of view? How would that have changed the film's meaning?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Consider the point of view of each of the major characters--Grandma, the Antique Collector, and the young boy, Tom. How would each answer the following questions?

1) In what ways are older people of great value to our society?

2) What should be the basis of our relationship to older people?

3) Should Grandma accept the Antique Collector's offer and go away with him? Why?

--GRANDMA

--THE ANTIQUE COLLECTOR

--THE YOUNG BOY, TOM

Then consider how your point of view compares with the three you considered above. Where did you either agree or disagree with the main characters' points of view?

INTRODUCTION

This simple animated film tells the story of a young man who, as he ages, seeks to live in a fantasy realm rather than deal realistically with his present circumstances. At the end of the film he learns, too late, that he has never really lived. The structure of the film follows the progress of his fantasizing throughout his life. Each scene showing the character in a real-life setting is followed by a scene in which fantasy replaces reality. At first he is concerned with what lies ahead. As a young boy he wants to be a young man; as a young boy he wants to be a young man; as a young man he wants to be a debonair suitor; when he meets a young woman, he dreams of being in bed with her. When he achieves this last dream, however, and is shown in his wedding bed, his imaginings turn from a concern about the future to an obsession with the past. When in bed with his wife he thinks of being with his old friends again; when at home in a quaint domestic scene, he imagines his wife a young woman in a sexy outfit; playing cards with his wife, he imagines her as a younger woman again; and alone at the end, he imagines his wife to be with him again, now as an old woman. Whether he looks ahead or behind, it is clear he loses what he has in the present at all times. Eventually he even loses the memories that have sustained him in later life.

An important structural element in the film is the use of a swinging pendulum that separates scenes. This repeated image suggests the relentless and unyielding force of time that is always at work in our lives. Each time it appears, its movement is accompanied by a loud clinking sound, not unlike the harsh ticking of a clock. The pendulum functions to interrupt life, to set off transitions in life, to remind us of the continual movement of experiences. This image also furthers our involvement and identification with the young man's responses to life. Each time the pendulum appears, a time in the young man's life has ended, and we too are invited to consider what we will do next when we become older.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Inform your audience that this film may challenge them to think about the way they view life. Perhaps they have heard of people whose view of life is dominated by their conviction that there is one major "high point" in their experience. That is, whatever leads up to the high point is only preparation for that climactic moment, and whatever happens afterward seems anticlimactic. Ask your audience to consider this philosophy of life for a moment. Given that point of view, what happens to a person whose "high point" occurs when he or she is twenty or thirty years old? What would the future hold? Ask if there are such patterns in our society (as in sports figures, for example) when a person "peaks" early in life. In another example, consider the person whose "high point"

occurs when he or she is fifty or sixty. How would that person tend to view retirement? Again, are there examples of such individuals in our society? (as in business and industry, for example). Ask your audience to view the film with some of these ideas in mind.

2) Viewers often associate animated films with non-serious subjects, for example, cartoons. Note that although the film is animated, it treats the subject matter of aging in a serious context. In that way the animation allows viewers to see the universals in the treatment of subject matter.

3) The film does not employ dialogue. Thus, the viewer can easily concentrate on the moving images on the screen. Encourage your viewers to experience the film visually, following the progression of scenes, and discovering meaning in the film's story by judging for themselves the significance of the interactions.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The written music for a love song appears on the screen. As we hear the music played, a large gold pendulum begins to swing methodically back and forth across the frame, its movement punctuated with a harsh clinking sound each time it crosses the frame.

   Outlined figures of three young men appear in animated form against a gray background. The three men are seated in a cafe, whispering and laughing among themselves. The camera pulls back, and we see in the foreground a young boy, eating an ice cream cone, watching the young men. He imagines himself in the place of one of the three men.

2. The pendulum crosses the screen, leaving it black. Then as it passes across the screen again, it reveals images of the young boy, each time a little older, until at last he is shown as a young man, smoking a pipe, sitting in a cafe with two companions. The three whisper and laugh among themselves.

   When an attractive young woman walks by their table, our young man turns to stare at her, but she is seated with a handsome older man, who commands her attention. The young man imagines himself in the place of the older man. Again the pendulum swings across the screen.

3. When it returns, we see him having realized his dream, sitting next to the beautiful young woman in the cafe. As they sit quietly, he imagines himself in bed with her.

   The pendulum returns, blacking out the screen for a moment. When it swings back, we see the two lovers in bed against a deep red background while passionate music plays. The music continues, then diminishes, and the background color returns to the usual gray. As the two lie together, the young man reaches for his pipe, and the smoke rising from the pipe, and the smoke rising from the pipe forms an image of the young man chatting with his two friends before he was married.

4. After another swing of the pendulum, we see a brief domestic scene, which is replaced momentarily by another scene, showing both considerably older. As he reads a "girlie" magazine, she knits, while they listen to music. He changes the station, and romantic music begins to play. He puts down the magazine, looks at his wife, who is preoccupied with her knitting, and imagines her as a young woman, wearing a bikini. But when he reaches out to touch her, his vision vanishes, and she returns to her old self. The pendulum swings.

5. Now both have aged, and they are playing cards, sitting across from each other. A large plant stands on the table behind them. After play is ended, he sits back and looks at his wife. He smiles, then imagines her as his young wife again. But when he reaches out to hold her hand, this image is soon replaced by that of his wife at her present age, an old woman. Moved by his touch, she lays her other hand out on the table, and he takes it in his, grasping both of her hands firmly for a moment. The pendulum swings.

6. The old man at the same table, still smoking his pipe. He has aged significantly, and now his back is stooped, and his wife is gone. The plant on the table behind him is a withered stalk. As he finishes a hand of solitaire, he looks at the empty chair across from him and imagines his wife is seated there again, an old woman, her hands held by his. But her image disappears, and he looks down at his empty hands on the table. The pendulum swings.

7. Finally, only the pipe he has been smoking is left on the table between two empty chairs. The smoke rises into the air and forms a cloud of smoke. Within this form we see an image of the young couple, who come together and kiss briefly. Then this image disappears, too.

--1971, Films, Inc., 9 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. Do you think this would be an effective film to begin with if one wanted to stimulate a discussion of attitudes toward the aging process?

2. What sort of mood did the film generate in you as you watched it? Why did it make you feel that way?

3. Which of the scenes in the film had the greatest emotional impact on you? Why?

II. The Man Who Wanted Something Else.

4. What do you think the main character wants throughout the film?

5. Did you notice any pattern to the main character's fantasies throughout the film? If so, what do you think the filmmaker meant to suggest by means of that pattern?

6. When the man is in bed with his wife, why does he imagine being with his old friends in the cafe? How does the nature of his fantasies change after his marriage?

III. Images of Aging.

7. What do you think is the significance of the swinging pendulum that separates each of the scenes?

8. How did the animation technique, incorporating the disappearance and reappearance of lines at different times in the film, help set the mood of the film?

9. What do you think is the significance of the last scene, showing the smoke from the man's pipe creating figures in the air? (Scene 7)

10. What role did the following play in the film: the pipe, the smoke, and the plant?

IV. The Study of Aging.

11. Are any of the characterizations or situations portrayed in the film stereotypical? If so, do they seriously detract from the film's message?

12. Does the film make you think of people you know or have known in your life? How are they like the main character in the film?

13. What does the film say about our relationship to time, or to the way we relate to time in our lives?

14. What statement does the film make about the aging process? How did this film make you feel about your own aging?

V. General Questions.

15. What ideas does the film generate about the nature of male/female roles in society?

16. What statement does the film make about the differences between fantasy and reality in our lives? Does it offer any suggestions as to how we can live our lives?

17. Why didn't the characters in the film grow and change as you might have expected if they had been realistic characters?

18. What do you think is meant by the title of the film, The Blessings of Love?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET A

As you view this film, consider each of the following questions as they relate to the presence of several key images:

1) What is the presence of each image meant to suggest in the film?

2) How does the presence of each image contribute to the overall mood of the film?

3) Were the four images linked together in any way as the action of the film progressed?

4) In what ways were these images able to put you in touch with your own thoughts about the aging process?

IMAGES:

--PENDULUM

--PIPE

--SMOKE

--PLANT

SAMPLE WORKSHEET B

Note the following scenes summarized below. In each case, answer the following questions:

1) As you viewed the film, which of these scenes had the greatest emotional impact on you personally? Why?

2) What do you think the filmmaker meant to communicate in each of these scenes? Did the scenes have anything in common?

3) Which of the scenes stands out in your memory as a climax or turning point in the film? Why?

SCENE 1--(from Scene 3) As the young couple lies in bed, the man lights his pipe, and the smoke rising from his pipe forms an image of the young man chatting with his old friends.

SCENE 2--(from Scene 5) The old couple, playing cards. He imagines her as a young woman again, but when he reaches out to take her hand, the image returns to that of his wife as an old woman. She takes his hand in hers.

SCENE 3--(from Scene 6) The old man, alone, imagines his wife seated across from him again as an old woman. But this image dissolves momentarily, and he is left alone, staring at his empty hands.

SCENE 4--(from Scene 7) The pipe, left on the table across from two empty chairs. The rising smoke forms an image of the young couple, who come together and kiss briefly, then disappear.

INTRODUCTION

I recommend Don't Count the Candles as an overview of aging or as an introduction to the subject, despite its early production date compared to other films that are available, because it offers many examples of visual symbolism that will move viewers emotionally. It presents a coherent, well-organized structure that invites comparisons of later scenes with earlier scenes; it portrays aging from the inside-out, letting older people tell their stories in an objective, straightforward way; it depicts the universality of our obsession with staying young and our fear of growing old; and it admits both the positive and negative aspects of aging. Finally, it does not sermonize or advocate a particular theory or philosophy regarding the subject.

The film begins with an image of children riding a carousel, an object we identify often with youth and vitality. At the end of the film, however, when we see the carousel again, all of the riders are old people, and all ride with looks of dignity and/or resignation on their faces. The image of the carousel has been used in other films in aging, e.g., One More Winter, and it was used prominently in the film Everybody Rides the Carousel, which depicted Erik Erikson's stages of life theory. In Don't Count the Candles the image is particularly effective because it becomes a visual symbol of the bond that unites all people, young and old. It signifies the round of all our existences, the celebrations and rituals we experience, and the inevitable end of our lives. Round and round we go, the film suggests, remembered or forgotten, dignified or debased, confident or fearful.

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

This film, photographed by Lord Snowden, former husband of Princess Margaret, is one of the earliest overviews of the subject of aging. Although it lacks the currency of recent surveys of aging, it more than makes up for its "old age" by being a well-organized, universal portrayal of our tendency to seek a fountain of youth that will postpone the physical decline of old age. Here are some pre-viewing activities you may want to consider:

1) The structure of the film invites viewers to compare images that appear early in the film and are repeated in different contexts at the end of the film. Some hints: watch for candles, clocks (watches), and carousels. Ask your audience to consider how these images become visual symbols in the film.

2) If your audience has had an opportunity to view recent films that serve as overviews of the subject, ask them to discuss what those films all had in common regarding their portrayal of

older people and the experiences older people faced. Ask them to view Don't Count the Candles with their knowledge of the content of these other films as a background.

3) Ask your audience to consider what this film will be about, based on its title, "Don't Count the Candles." You might mention the myth of the "Fountain of Youth" and find out how familiar your audience is with the implications of that myth.

SUMMARY OF SCENES*

*Because of the length of this film, and because of the number of scenes involved in writing a complete summary, I will include only a partial summary of the film, highlighting some of the more impressive visual sequences.

1. The film begins with a scene showing a young girl, in closeup, blowing out the candles on a large cake. Then we see an older woman seated near a carousel. The narrator says, "Ours is an age that venerates the young. The old we tolerate." Five scenes follow, showing different individuals, experiencing what appears to be the meager rewards of growing old: a man at his retirement party, where he receives as gold watch as a "token of affection"; an infirm couple, quietly eating a meal; a physical therapy session in a nursing home, showing the old people lifting their canes up and down to exercise their limbs; an old woman, alone in her room, who wishes she could go out on outings: "I haven't been out for three years"; and several people on a bus, one woman singing out loud, although she has no specific audience in mind.

2. After this introduction, the filmmaker includes a longer scene showing a former admiral and his wife, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria. They are seated on a bench near the woods on their large estate. Both are rather feeble, but they chat gaily. "One gets old without knowing it," he says. Both are hard of hearing, but they continue to converse. "One never visualizes oneself as getting old. It's one of those things you never think can happen to you," she says. She mentions that without her glasses she sees double. He kids her, "Sounds as if you've been drinking." Then he helps her to her feet, since it is tea time. "Can you wander with me?" she asks. "I'll wander with you anywhere you like," he replies. They walk toward the house, chatting amiably.

3. Three scenes depict various images of loneliness: first, at a spa where people are seated apart from one another at tables in the dining room; second, an interview with a man who says, "I'm beginning to feel the first

signs of loneliness, and it's worrying me"; third, an old woman, seated alone in a room. We see a closeup of her huge swollen ankles. Her parakeet chatters continuously in its cage. "He's company when you've got no other company. He says, 'Hello, Topsy,' and 'Kiss me, Topsy.'" We see a beautiful porcelain doll, dressed neatly, and seated at this woman's table. "The doll cheers me up when I come here. I'll tell you that." When she looks at the doll, the old woman says, "It's like she's going to speak to me. And always there's a smile on her face." We see a closeup of the doll's face, with dainty painted lips and wide-open eyes. "I won't part with her."

4. Scenes in this section compare images of youth with the eternal search for youth. The British model, Twiggy, open the scene, her body extremely thin and her face like a doll's face. She dances and mugs in front of the camera, apparently at a photo session. Several scenes follow showing a middle-aged man having a hairpiece fitted at a wig salon. He seems fascinated by the change it evokes in his appearance. These scenes are interwoven with wry and insightful comments made by an older man about the physical decline associated with aging. At the end of the section we see scenes in an antiquated gym, where women are working out on various types of machines, which stretch, twist, pound, and shake the body of the people who strap themselves into them.

5. The scenes here continue the depiction of people's search for a fountain of youth. Much of this section includes graphic scenes showing the preparation of a special liquid, processed from the placenta and body parts of unborn fetuses from a special herd of ewes in Switzerland, who are slaughtered before they give birth so that the materials can be removed intact for laboratory processing. Once it is prepared, the liquid is injected into people as a means of rejuvenating their bodies. Interspersed with these scenes of lab work are ones showing people in steam cabinets, being massaged, having wrinkle-cream applied, and having hairpieces fitted. Near the end of this section we watch a man who receives some of the large dosage of the special elixer via injection into the fatty area near his hip.

6. Scenes in this section concentrate on upbeat responses to aging. The narrator says, "Some people tiptoe gingerly into old age; others approach it with zest and enthusiasm." We see an old couple repeating marriage vows, then observe four special people: a member of the nobility, who talks about the "intensity" of old age; a writer, who notes the speed with which time passes in old age; a sculptor, working on her art; and the conductor Leopold Stokowski, rehearsing an orchestra and choir. The scene that focuses on Stokowski is particularly moving.

7. The final stage of life, a time of decline. The narrator introduces this section: "When a man who has attained distinction in his life becomes old, we tend to treat him with reverence and awe, but those who are not so eminent we're inclined to view rather differently." We watch an old man being taken to a nursing home by his daughters. He sits in a corner of a room among strangers. Then we view scenes from a funeral procession and service.

At the end of this scene we see a woman praying at a large rack of votive candles, most of them lit, the wax melting. Then the scene changes to show a woman, alone in her house, as the camera focuses on the intricate workings of a large clock on the table in her room. This shot dissolves and is replaced by an image of a carousel, turning round and round to stately music. All of the riders on the carousel are old people, and they ride quietly, dignified expressions on their faces.

--1968, CBS Broadcast International,
54 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What scenes stand out in your memory after viewing this film?
2. What are some of the ways this film differs from other film introductions to aging that you have seen in recent years?

II. Images and Structure.

3. How did the images of candles, clocks, and carousels function as visual symbols in the film? What did those images make you feel when the filmmaker focused on them?
4. Did you notice any consistent structure to the scenes throughout the film? That is, was there any pattern established and then repeated throughout the film?
5. Simone de Beauvoir, in The Coming of Age, writes, "Even as early as the Egyptians, people cherished the hope that they might defeat the decline of old age. There is a papyrus that reads, 'The beginning of the book on the way of changing an old man into a young one.' It advises the eating of fresh glands taken from young animals.'" (p. 92). What section of the film offers an instance of this ancient idea? What impression did those scenes make on you?

III. The People in the Film.

6. Which of the people in the film had the greatest impact on you?
7. Did any of the comments made by people surprise you in any way? What made them so unexpected?

IV. Audience Response.

8. Did the film ever make you feel uncomfortable? Can you remember specific scenes that had that effect?

9. What did you feel was the overall mood conveyed by this film?

10. To what extent were you able to identify with what the people in the film either directly or indirectly had to say about aging?

11. If you had to note some of the words that by association come to you after viewing this film, which of the following would you have mentioned? --nobility --pity --folly --loneliness --fear --honesty --determination

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Before viewing the film, take a few minutes to read over the following quotes that you will be hearing in the film. As you view the film, jot down either who the speaker was or what the action being depicted was in that scene. After viewing the film, you will have time to discuss your response to those statements you felt were most compelling, unexpected, or thought-provoking.

1) "Ours is an age that venerates the young. The old, we tolerate."

2) "One gets old without knowing it. One never visualizes oneself as getting old. It's one of those things you never think can happen to you."

3) "I see their sagging breasts, their false teeth, the bald patch, the veins in their elbows, . . . and I feel that this is something that's got to be helped."

4) "If I had enough money, I'd go to a health farm and have hot water pumped in at both ends and be smacked about if I thought it would genuinely increase my delight and joy in living."

5) "Sometimes we're apt to have a wry laugh at the terrible, sinister appearance of old ladies, but we should applaud their courage. They are not only trying to deceive the world, but they are trying to deceive themselves."

6) Now that I've reached that age, I discover that old age is a complete myth. I feel the cutting edge of life just as sharp. I don't feel serenity. I feel intensity."

7) "The older you get, the more you long to be looked after, like a child. You want to know that at the end of it all you're not just going to be put into a box, buried in the damp, cool earth."

The Giving Tree

INTRODUCTION

This animated film recreates the Shel Silverstein story, using line drawings set against a gray background. The quality of the animation is superb, and the characters move realistically, coming alive on the screen, then dissolving as if by magic as the scene ends. The first scene establishes the tree and the young boy as the only "characters" on the screen. Successive scenes show the boy aging progressively until at the end of the film he is an old man, tottering on a cane. The interactions between the tree and the boy create a pattern that is repeated in every scene:

1) The tree's love for the boy is constant throughout their relationship.
2) The boy views the tree only as a source for meeting his ever-changing needs.
3) Each time the boy returns, the tree invites him to join in play, but the boy always makes an excuse for not playing.
4) Each time the tree meets the boy's current needs, the narrator says, "And the tree was happy."
5) Throughout the film the tree refers to the other character as the "boy," even when the "boy" becomes an old man.

These recurring interactions draw viewers into the world of this simple film, provoking a complex set of emotional responses by the time the last scene has played itself out. This "children's story" will lead to a sustained and thoughtful discussion of its ideas on the part of viewers.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask members of your audience if they have read the Shel Silverstein story. Ask those who have if they have ever read the story to their children. If so, what response did the story elicit? Did their children like the story? Those familiar with the story will want to compare the filmed version with the original to see if any changes have been made.

2) If you are showing the film to an audience primarily of young children, prepare them for viewing the film by telling them that the film tells the story of a relationship between a tree and a little boy. Ask them if they know any stories about trees who talk to little boys, or about little boys who talk to trees? Let them know that after they have viewed the film, you will be interested in learning how they felt about the two characters.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. A tree and a young boy enjoy an idyllic relationship. As the narrator says, "She loved the little boy and every day the little boy would come and play." We see the boy frolicking with the tree. "The boy loved the tree very much. And the tree was happy."

2. Time passes, and a young woman joins the boy--now a young man--under the tree. Both leave, and when the boy returns, he turns aside the tree's offer to play: "I'm too big to climb and play." He asks the tree for money. The tree offers its apples, which can be sold. The boy takes the tree's apples. "And the tree was happy."

3. The boy returns, now a man. "I'm too busy to climb trees," he says. He asks the tree for a house. The tree offers its branches and limbs so that the boy can construct a house. The boy takes them, leaving only the bare trunk. "And the tree was happy."

4. The boy returns, a middle-aged man carrying a suitcase. "I'm too old and sad to play," he grumbles, when the tree sways with joy at seeing him again. He asks the tree for a boat to take him away from there. The tree offers its trunk so the boy can fashion a boat. The boy carries away the trunk. "And the tree was happy."

5. Now only a stump remains, but when the boy returns, tottering across the screen, we see him as an old man, stooped low, supported by a cane. The tree throbs with joy. "I'm too old to swing on branches . . . I'm too tired to climb," the boy groans. The tree apologizes for having nothing to give. The boy laments, "I don't need very much now. Just a quiet place to sit and rest." The tree offers its stump, the only thing it has left to give. Wearily the old man sits down. "And the tree was happy."

--1973, Bosustow Productions, 10 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. When this film ended, were you happy or sad? Why?

2. If you could have changed one part of the action that took place in the film in order to prevent the ending from occurring as it did in the film, what would you have changed? Why?

II. The Giving Tree.

3. What were some of the "human" characteristics given the tree in the film? How was the meaning of the film enhanced by giving the tree those human characteristics?

4. What point is the author trying to make by portraying the tree's nature as a constant?

III. The Boy and the Tree.

5. When did you first notice a pattern emerging in the relationship between the boy and the tree? What was intended by establishing that pattern?

6. Throughout the film the tree refers to the other character as the "boy," even when the boy seems to age. What does that reveal about the tree? What does it reveal about the basis of their relationship?

7. Every time the boy returned, the tree asked him to join it in play, but the boy always had an excuse. What did this reveal about the boy's character?

IV. The Ending.

8. Do you think the boy ever grew up?

9. What does the tree gain through its relationship with the boy?

10. Each time the boy accepts the tree's help, the narrator comments, "And the tree was happy." When you heard that refrain at the end of the film, what effect did it have on you?

11. How would the response of younger audiences to this film differ from the response of older audiences?

INTRODUCTION

This film draws viewers into the world of an older person by transforming his thoughts into part of the visual information provided in the film's story. Rather than presenting the loneliness of an older person as an abstract idea, in effect, "telling" viewers that a particular character is experiencing loneliness, the filmmaker portrays an old man's loneliness concretely, thus "showing" us his emotional pain.

A climactic scene in the film depicts the encounter between an old man, sitting at home alone on Christmas Eve, and a young boy, dressed in clothes from the past. The boy enters the old man's house and speaks to the old man, telling him that he had wanted to go home for Christmas. We have followed the young boy's progress in the film up to this point, and we have witnessed his disappointment at not being able to catch a bus for his home town so that he could go home for Christmas. But what are we to think when he walks into the old man's house and they begin conversing as if they know each other? Who is that young boy?

The answer to this question is apparent when we gain a clearer understanding of the young boy's relationship to the old man. We can imagine the old man sitting alone in his house that Christmas Eve, thinking about the past, recalling happier times, when he went home for Christmas, and when he was reunited with his family. As his loneliness deepens, he wishes he could experience again those happy times. At this point the filmmaker is confronted with a simple problem: how to represent the old man's thoughts visually. The solution is the creation of another character--the young boy, a character from the past, in one sense, but a a projection of the old man's imagination in another sense. Thus, the climactic scene we witness between the young boy and the old man is the visual equivalent of a lonely reverie. We see the man's own thoughts appear before him in the form of the young boy, the child within the old man. Presented with this visual symbolism, viewers are able to see the two characters as one.

Such an identification is intensified by the filmmaker's decision to project the old man's thoughts in the form of a young boy rather than, for example, a middle-aged man. We all know that Christmas is a special time for children. When they are deprived of the opportunity to experience the joyous sharing of happy memories with their families, we feel it is a great loss. By characterizing the old man as someone who still has the child within him, this same sense of loss is associated with the old man's painful reminiscences. The climax of this scene occurs when the image of the young boy, lying in the old man's lap, slowly dissolves, leaving the old man alone in his chair. At that moment viewers can identify with the suffering of the old man because they understand that he has not lost the child's ability to value Christmas for the right reasons--as a time of loving and caring for others.

The scene that follows their conversation adds to the complexity of the roles being played by the main characters. As a transition between the two scenes, we see a closeup of the old man's face. He has just received a phone call from his son, who plans to pick him up so that he can be home for Christmas. As this closeup dissolves, it is replaced by a closeup of a young boy, standing by the side of the road in the dark. This boy is dressed in the same clothes the other young boy was wearing. In effect, they are the same young boy. Even more to the point, the image of the young boy by the side of the road is another manifestation of the old man. When the family stops to pick him up, they are actually picking up the old man. Remember the phone call?

But if viewers wonder why they see the young boy get into the car, and not the old man, they need only remember the integral role that visual symbolism plays in film. In other words, the entire film has tried to demonstrate that although the pain of loneliness experienced by older people is as intense at it is for all people, acting upon our capacity for love, especially between members of a family, saves us from loneliness and makes us eternally young. At the same time viewers are made aware that the child within the old man, like the child within us all, reminds us that we need to experience again and again the togetherness that is sustained by loving relationships. Part of the beauty of this film is that the old man's family acknowledges the vitality and wisdom within the old man and acts on it, seeking his companionship.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

The meaning of this film depends to a great extent on an understanding of the symbolic relationship between the young boy and the old man. You can be sure that after viewing the film, your audience will want to discuss the nature of that relationship. To prepare them for viewing the film, consider the following activities:

1) Ask your audience to consider how a film goes about getting inside a character's mind or thoughts in order to portray a state of mind or point of view. Since film is primarily a visual medium, it will necessarily try to use visual means to accomplish that end. Other approaches would be rejected quickly by the audience. For instance, having a character telling the audience directly what he is thinking soon becomes boring to an audience. Listening to a narrator, either appearing on-screen or as a voice-over off-screen, again limits the visual impact that would otherwise be possible. Encourage your audience to focus on the information that is presented to them visually in the film. Note that there is little dialogue in the first half of the film. Your audience will be able to discover meaning in the film if they are receptive to that visual structure.

2) The importance of being "home for Christmas," or home for other special family reunions, is something everyone in your audience should be able to relate to. Ask some of the members of the audience to share some of their memories about special times with the family, especially when they were younger. Let those recollections serve as a background for the viewing of the film. You do not need to make any further explicit connections with the film before viewing it.

3) Be sensitive to your audience's religious backgrounds when you consider showing this film. Although Christian symbolism is not a central feature of the structure or content of the film, the references to "Christmas" necessarily direct its application to a particular audience.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. An exterior of a wood-frame house in winter. We hear piano music, then see the exterior of a doorway of a shop in the city. As we watch, suddenly the image of a young boy, wearing an old brown cap, black coat, and knickers, appears in the doorway. He pulls out a coin purse from his pocket and checks the amount of money inside. He walks down the sidewalk, past modern storefronts, and we see other people, wearing modern dress, walk past him. He looks out of place in this setting. In a moment he walks down a dark alley and is out of sight.

2. At a bus depot, people crowded in their seats. The clerk at the ticket window sells the last seat on the bus and chats briefly with a secretary in the back room. "A typical Christmas Eve," she says. Then the young boy appears at the window, getting his money out to buy a bus ticket. But the clerk tells him the bus is filled.

3. The bus arrives, and the boy stays by the window, as if not sure what he should do. After the bus departs, the boy begins to put his money back into the coin purse. The clerk, moved by the boy's situation, asks the secretary in the back room if she would take a rider with her when she leaves for home after closing time. She agrees to take the boy.
   Hours later, the station is dark, and we see the secretary's car on the road, a wintry landscape around it. The boy is inside. When the secretary tries to make conversation, the boy answers briefly, then remains silent. He has only one thing on his mind--getting home for Christmas.

4. Somewhere on the highway, farther ahead, we see another young boy standing on the side of the road. He appears to be dressed in the same way as the boy who is in the car. As the secretary's car approaches, he holds out his arm, trying to catch a ride. But the car doesn't stop. After the car has passed the young boy on the road, we see the young boy inside the car look back over his shoulder through the back window. There is a thoughtful look on his face, but he keeps his thoughts to himself.

5. From a distance we see the car stop at a gas station in the next town, watch the boy get out of the car, and then see him walk away into the darkness. In a moment he approaches the exterior of the wood-frame house we saw in the first scene. He goes inside without knocking and begins to take off his coat.

6. An old man is sitting alone in the living room. He is wearing a brown sweater over a red, checked shirt. He reacts to the sounds he hears. Then, while the camera stays on him, we see him react with disbelief to something in the room.

   We see the young boy standing in the middle of the room, shown from the old man's point of view. The boy is wearing a brown sweater over a red, checked shirt. He tells the old man, "I wanted to go home." We see the old man as he responds softly, as if talking to himself, "I know." Then the boy says, "I wanted to see Mom and Dad again, and the big Christmas tree we used to have. Remember?" Back to the old man: "I remember." The boy again: "I wanted to feel it again . . . the warm feeling, the family, together on Christmas Eve. I wanted to go back home." Closeup of the old man: "You can't go back." Then we see the young boy walk up to the old man and lie in the old man's lap, the back of his head against the man's chest. This image holds for a moment, then it dissolves, as if by magic, and we view the old man sitting in the chair alone again, a small Christmas tree on the table next to him.

7. The old man looks at the tree for a moment, then reaches out and fingers some of the needles at the end of a branch. The needles, apparently very dry, fall to the table, and the shot changes to show the falling needles in a closeup. Back to the old man, who sips some tea, then sits slumped in his chair. The telephone rings. The old man looks surprised, then answers the phone. His son greets him and announces that he and the family are coming to pick him up.

   Old Man: But you live so far away.
   Son: Never mind that. Ellen and the kids want granddad to spend Christmas with us.
   Old Man: I don't want to be a burden, John.
   Son: You can be as independent as you want for the rest of the year, but we're bringing you home for Christmas.

   After the conversation ends, we see the old man in a closeup, his face pensive. As this image dissolves, within it a smaller image of the young boy appears, wearing a cap and coat. He is standing by himself on the side of the road. We realize this is the same boy we saw earlier (Scene 4).

9. In the distance car lights can be seen, and as the young boy waits, the car approaches, and the light strikes his face. The boy smiles, and we see a quick shot of the family in the car waving at him happily. When the car stops, the mother opens the door, and says, "Sorry we're late." The two children are excited to see the boy. The father says, "Let's go home." As the car drives down the road, the camera turns to show it receding away from us. In the center of the screen we see a small pine tree by the side of the road, about the same size as the one that was on the table in the old man's house. Suddenly, at the top of the tree a magical star shines brightly for a moment, then is gone.

--1981, Centron Films, 15 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What questions about the meaning of certain scenes or the identity of certain characters do you feel need to be addressed before you can understand the film's overall meaning? Share your ideas of what specific scenes were meant to convey and what certain characters were meant to represent.

2. Where did you see examples of visual magic in the film, and what meanings did you think they were intended to convey?

II. Visual Meanings.

3. Three times in the film we see characters either appear or disappear as if by magic on the screen:

   In Scene 1 the young boy appears in the doorway.
   In Scene 6 the young boy, lying in the old man's lap, disappears.
   In Scene 8 the young boy on the road appears as the old man's face, in closeup, dissolves.

   What effect did these examples of visual magic have on the overall mood of the film? What do you think the examples from Scenes 6 and 8 were meant to suggest?

4. After the image of the young boy disappears from the old man's lap (Scene 6), the old man looks at the Christmas tree on the table next to him and fingers the needles at the end of a branch. Some of the needles fall to the table below. What is being communicated in this scene?

5. When the family picks up the young boy at the end of the film, the camera focuses on a small pine tree by the side of the road for a moment. Then a star magically twinkles at the top of the tree. What do you think this was meant to signify?

III. Questions of Identity.

6. Who was the first young boy we saw? Can you refer to a specific scene in which you learned his identity?

7. Why did the filmmaker dress the young boy and the old man in similar brown sweaters and red, checked shirts?

8. Who was the second boy we saw, the one on the the side of the road at night? Can you refer to a specific scene in which you learned his identity?

9. At what point in the film did you have some idea of who either of the boys were or what they represented?

10. What did the filmmaker intend by choosing a young boy as the character who wanted to go home for Christmas? Why not choose a young man or a middle-aged man instead?

IV. Understanding the Old Man.

11. What opinion did you form of the old man when you first saw him alone in the house and then when you saw him interact with the young boy?

12. What is the filmmaker trying to represent in the scene where the young boy enters the old man's home and talks to the old man?

13. Explain what the last scene in the film (Scene 9) was supposed to represent. Who was the family in the car? Why didn't we ever see the old man being picked up by his family? Or did we?

V. The Film's Statement of Ideas

14. What are some of the ways this film is a symbolic portrayal of old age?

15. What do you think this film tries to convey about the loneliness of old age?

16. What statement does the film make about the place of older people in the family?

17. If you viewed this film within a specific religious context, what ideas did you think it was able to communicate?

VI. General Questions.

18. What feelings did the film evoke, especially regarding your memory of special times of the year or reminiscences of life in the past?

19. Is the film primarily about the young boy, or is it about the old man?

20. How did the music contribute to your understanding of the film's meaning?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Several examples of "visual magic" or visual symbolism appear in the film. Consider each of the references to scenes in the film that incorporate examples of visual symbolism. In each case, consider the following questions:

a) What do you think the example of visual magic was meant to convey?

b) What effect did this example of visual magic have on the mood of the specific scene? What was your emotional response to the images?

c) Who were the two young boys we saw in different scenes meant to represent and/or symbolize? What was their relationship to the old man?

d) How did the use of the visual symbolism help the filmmaker convey ideas about aging?

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1) We first see the young boy, dressed in strange out-of-date garb, appear mysteriously in a doorway, walk down a modern street.

2) As the young boy is riding in the car with the woman that night, he sees another young boy--who looks exactly like him--standing on the roadside.

3) The young boy enters the old man's house, walks into the room where the old man is sitting, and starts a conversation. After the two talk for a moment, the boy sits in the old man's lap, and his image disappears.

4) After the old man receives the phone call from his son, the closeup of the old man's face dissolves, and it is replaced by the face of the young boy, standing on the side of the road.

5) The family stops their car and welcomes the young boy inside. The father in the car says, "Let's go home."

6) As the car drives away, a small pine tree--looking suspiciously like the small Christmas tree on the table next to the old man in his room--is lighted by a magical star that glistens just for a moment and then is gone.

INTRODUCTION

This delightful film, of interest to young and old viewers alike, tells the story of a boy's encounter with a magical toy carousel, a "roundabout," owned by an old man who lives in his neighborhood. At first the young boy is identified as one of several children who spend time running aimlessly to and fro on the narrow streets of an English town. But when he and his playmates run into an old man, returning from the market, and knock his sack of groceries out of his hand, the young boy is the only one of the children to stop and help the old man retrieve his groceries. This act of kindness leads to a fascinating encounter with the magic of the roundabout in the old man's house.

The carousel, fitted with four tiny wooden horses, actually is the star of this film. We see it in the opening scene, alone with the old man. As it sits on a window ledge inside the old man's house, it begins to move under its own power, as if insisting that he wind it up so that it can play. Later in the film, when the boy enters the house for the first time, the carousel comes to life again, as if excited by the boy's presence. At the end of the film, when the carousel appears to be broken and beyond repair, its movements stimulate the old man and the boy to replace its missing parts so that it can be wound up and started again.

The magic of this film depends on our understanding that this carousel is not simply a toy or a machine. It is alive, and it has a mind of its own--and its one desire is to play, turning round and round in an endless circle, accompanied by its lively music. But its desire to play only can be satisfied when the old man winds up its mainspring with a metal key. Thus, the "life" of this machine is bound up inextricably in a curious relationship with the old man, whose affection for this machine is more than the usual sentimental affection for a childhood toy. In fact, the relationship is analogous to a father's love for a child.

The warmth of the relationship between the old man and the carousel is matched by the attachment that develops between the old man and the young boy. The filmmaker fosters this relationship without the aid of dialogue, using vivid imagery and closeups to connect the experiences of the two main human characters. The dominant image is that of the carousel in motion, suggesting an enthusiasm for life, the circularity of our existence, and the continuity that exists between childhood and old age when the imagination of the "child" in us is not lost. It is appropriate, then, that the film ends with a scene showing the old man and the young boy happily riding a full-sized carousel together. Their common bond has been their capacity for wonder and the active role of their imaginations.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask members of your audience if they know what a "roundabout" is. You may want to note that it is a British term for merry-go-round or carousel. Ask them if they rode on carousels when they were children. How long has it been since they rode on a carousel? Do they think carousels are only for children?

2) Tell your audience that there will be no dialogue in the film they are about to see. Ask them to watch the combination of images and the movement of the various scenes in order to follow the story being told in the film.

3) Tell your audience that there will be magic in the film they are about to see. Ask them to watch for the source of that magic as the film progresses.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The camera focuses on a stone house at the edge of an English town. Seated outside is an old man, napping in the sun. Behind him, sitting on a window ledge inside the house, is a toy carousel. It is about a foot high, and its four wooden horses are painted white. The carousel is covered with a metal, tent-shaped cover, and a red pennant tops off the toy. Suddenly it comes to life, as if trying to start by itself. Its pennant twirls, its spring tightens, and its bells ring. But when the old man opens his eyes and looks around, the carousel stops.

   He goes inside, takes the carousel into another room, and sets it high upon a shelf. As he begins to dress for an errand, the machine whirs intermittently, as if wanting to start again. He smiles at this whimsical behavior, but before he leaves, he inserts a large metal key, winds up the machine, and starts it up. The horses go round and round, the gems in their eyes glistening in the light, as the machine provides its own music. We see "Jennie's Galloping Horses" written on the circular side of the carousel as it spins around.

2. The old man leaves, walking with the aid of a cane. Inside, the machine keeps whirling around. At a street corner several children almost collide with the old man. They run past him and dart here and there through the narrow alleys and streets of the city.

Meanwhile, we see the man buying fresh produce at market stalls. But when he rounds a corner on the way home, the children run headlong into him, knocking his sack of groceries to the sidewalk. As he sits down to retrieve his goods, one of the children, a brown-haired boy with a serious expression on his face, stops to help. The other children creep back to watch at a distance. The boy carries the old man's sack for him and the two depart, leaving a broken egg behind them on the street.

3. We see them walking past the window of the house. Inside, the carousel is whirring round and round, accompanied by its own music. But when the boy and the man appear outside, the machine stops playing.

   Inside, the boy carries the groceries into the kitchen. We see a closeup of one of the white horses, its eye gleaming, as it turns to look toward the boy. When the boy brings a glass of water to the old man, the machine, still high on the shelf, comes to life briefly, waving its red pennant and sounding a few notes. Hearing the sound, the boy looks up and sees the machine. Then he climbs up on a chair and takes it down to look at it closely. But the old man gets up, puts it back on the shelf, and sits down again.

   The boy accepts this gloomily, but then becomes interested in an old photograph on the table in front of him. He holds the picture up close and notices that it shows a young girl, a ribbon in her hair, holding the same carousel on her lap. He looks up at the carousel in the room to make sure. Then he examines other pictures on the table. They show what appear to be family scenes, groups of friends, and one picture of a full-sized carousel in an outdoor setting. He carefully returns these pictures to a box on the table.

   When he sees his friends running outside, he looks at the old man still sleeping in the chair, and then leaves the house. He rejoins his friends, but he stands apart from them, as if deep in thought. He fingers a few coins in his pocket.

4. He appears at the old man's door again. Notice that his friends stand at the end of the row of houses, watching the scene. When the old man answers the door, the boy hands him a small paper sack. Inside is a single egg, meant to replace the one broken when the children ran into the old man. The old man smiles and invites the boy inside.

   The carousel begins to chime, as if asking for attention. The old man looks up at it and smiles. Then he takes it down and sets it on the window ledge again. The machine sings a few notes and shakes back and forth, as if anticipating more play.

   The old man winds it up, sits down, and slips the key into the pocket of his coat. As the machine starts, the boy puts his face close to it and watches its go round and round, fascinated by the movement and by the sound of the music. The old man sleeps, a smile on his face.

   The boy continues to gaze at the machine, and suddenly the scene changes to show a full-sized carousel in an outdoor setting. We hear loud calliope music and see the boy riding one of the large wooden horses. As the machine goes around, the boy notices a young girl, a ribbon in her hair, standing off to the side, a sad look on her face.

5. We return to the original scene. The machine stops, and the boy tries to start it again by gently pushing it. The carousel waves its pennant back and forth, but the horses remain fixed. After looking over at the old man, who is still asleep, the boy carries the machine outside and sets it on top of a low stone wall at the back of the house. The carousel seems to move under its own power, turning slightly to an fro, but then stops. The boy returns to the house, and climbs up to look for the key on the shelf. But he doesn't find it there.

   When he returns outside, the machine is gone. The boy runs off to find it. We see his playmates carrying it away, headed for some open ground in in an area surrounded by the walls of buildings that have fallen down long ago. They try to force the machine to start, but it won't budge. When they continue to pull at it violently, the carousel begins to spin unevenly, its sound harsh and grating.

   The scene changes abruptly to show a full-sized carousel, the same one we saw the boy riding earlier. This time, however, we see wooden tigers as well as wooden horses, and the boy's playmates are riding the figures. But this ride is wild and violent, and the children hang on desperately, fearful looks on their faces. The sound becomes louder and harsher, and the spinning seems to grow more violent, until the scene ends as abruptly as it began. We see the children drop the toy carousel onto the grass and run away.

6. The old man wakes up, looks around, and realizes the carousel is gone.

   The boy finds the machine at last, many parts of the mechanism either bent or twisted out of shape. One of the wooden horses has been separated from its support poles and lays in the grass next to the carousel. The boy picks up all of the pieces and returns toward the house. He meets the old man halfway. Both have somber expressions on their faces. The old man takes the machine from the boy and walks away, stopping to set down on a stone wall nearby. He holds the broken machine on his lap, and when the boy approaches him, almost in tears, the old man shakes his head sadly from side to side.

   Suddenly the red pennant twirls back and forth, and the machine sounds an encouraging note. The old man and boy quickly begin to repair the machine as much as they can, fitting the last horse into its place. Then the old man inserts the wind-up key, the boy pulls the lever to start the machine, and the carousel begins to spin round and round again, its music sounding loud and clear. The scene changes again to show the full-sized carousel in its outdoor setting. This time the boy and the old man are riding the same wooden horse, and both smile widely as the carousel goes round and round.

--1978, Churchill Films, 19 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. Can you recall the stages in the developing relationship between the old man and the boy? What actions seemed to bring them closer together? What did the two appear to have in common?

2. What was special about the relationship between the old man and the carousel? What did the carousel appear to mean to the old man?

3. Did the absence of dialogue in the film detract from your understanding of the story? Would anything have been gained by the use of dialogue?

II. The Magic of the Carousel.

4. When did you first notice that the carousel was something other than a normal machine or toy? Can you recall other instances when the carousel exhibited unusual properties?

5. What was your response when you realized that the carousel seemed to have a life of its own? What aspects of its character did you enjoy the most? In what ways was the carousel like a child?

6. What was your response when you saw the carousel's pennant wave back and forth when it was being held by the old man at the end of the film? What was happening in this scene?

III. The Old Man and the Boy.

7. In what ways was the boy different from his playmates? Can you recall any acts of kindness he exhibited in the film?

8. When the boy looked at the photograph of the young girl holding the toy carousel in her lap, who did you think she was? Did you think she was related to the old man in any way?

9. When the boy was riding the full-sized carousel for the first time, he saw a young girl standing off to the side, a sad expression on her face. Who was this girl?

10. Why did the boy come back to see the old man a second time? Why was this a turning point in their relationship?

11. How would you characterize the reactions of the old man and the boy to the apparent destruction of the carousel? Why did they respond that way? How were their responses a means of bringing them closer together?

12. Can you recall the last scene in the film? What feelings did that scene evoke as you watched it? Why was it an appropriate ending for the film?

IV. The Meaning of the Film.

13. What point do you think the filmmaker is trying to make by portraying in this film a boy's encounter with a machine that has a life of its own?

14. What do you think the film is trying to communicate about the following: fantasy, friendship, responsibility, love.

15. How do you think children would react to this story of a machine that has a life of its own? What are some of the things children could learn from viewing this film?

16. Did the film remind you of any childhood experiences? How is the meaning of the film related to our understanding of the role of the imagination in childhood?

17. How did the setting of the film contribute to your understanding of the story being told? What mood was conveyed by the use of that setting?

18. Can you recall any images that were highlighted by the use of extreme closeups? Why did the filmmaker use those particular shots?

INTRODUCTION

The main character in this film, an old woman who lives alone in a tenement building in Paris, makes a meager living sewing purses on her antiquated machine. She maintains vitality in her life by nurturing a string-bean plant in her dimly-lit garret apartment. When she feels she can do no more for it in such a hostile, restricted environment, she replants it in a flower bed in a large formal garden located in a city park. During the summer the plant flourishes, and she spends her free time sitting on a nearby park bench, admiring her "offspring." At the end of the growing season the bean plant has matured and produced ample pods.

By this time any sensitive viewer will have been won over by the enduring qualities of hope, persistence, and love the old woman repeatedly demonstrates in her affection for the string-bean. The filmmaker effectively uses both color and black and white photography to subtly draw us into the contrasting worlds the old woman inhabits and foster our warm attachment to her character. The black and white world of her meager one-room apartment, the run-down tenement, and the gloomy alley that connects her to that environment represent the deprivation and despair of old age. Set against this darkness is the color world of the park, the flower gardens, and the elusive blue sky that is visible above the skylight in her apartment. When she enters the world of color, she participates in the life around her. These two worlds, then, are despair and hope, death and life. Although her fate is to live in both worlds, she accepts this challenge and attunes herself to the reality of both worlds. She faces life as it is: sadness with happiness, gloom with joy, desolation with a sense of purpose.

Thus, when the climactic scene occurs, we are not surprised by her response. One day the string-bean is uprooted violently by gardeners, who have spotted the "weed" growing among flowers. They do not see her standing nearby. Undaunted by their actions, she retrieves some beans from the plant before the gardeners can dispose of it, returns to her apartment, and plants some of the seeds in a fresh pot. By accepting her painful loss as an integral part of her experience, the old woman inspires us to view old age as a time of self-determination and renewal.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask your audience to make a list of those qualities they most admire in older persons. Then ask members of your audience to share some of their ideas with the others in the group and perhaps list the responses on a blackboard or poster in front of the group. After viewing the film, the audience will want to compare their "list" with the qualities they observed in the old woman's character.

2) Ask your audience to consider some of the "unusual" or "out-of-the-ordinary" ways older people entertain or amuse themselves. Why does society sometimes attach a negative meaning to such amusements, associating them with senility, loneliness, or maladjustment? Ask members of your audience if they can think of any examples of behaviors that others may consider inappropriate, but which they believe are appropriate given the particular environment or circumstances of an older person. Announce that this film offers an instance of behavior that merits careful review rather than a quick prejudgment on the part of viewers.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We see the interior of a small apartment, filmed in black and white. The camera focuses on a box of hand-made coin purses, a sewing basket, and an old woman at an ancient sewing machine. There is no dialogue in the film, but in the background we hear music that suggests a mood of resignation and sadness. Completing another purse, the old woman puts her machine away, removes a pan from the cupboard, and puts a handful of beans in the pan. Moving slowly and deliberately, she goes outside and fills a pan with water from a dingy sink in the narrow hallway. After covering the pan, she dresses and leaves her apartment, walking down a dark, narrow hallway.

2. Suddenly the film is in color and we see the old woman entering a lovely park in the city. The music brightens. All around her are flower gardens, fountains, and well-manicured lawns. She rests on a park bench to enjoy her surroundings.

3. When she returns home (in black and white), she finds a flower pot in a trash can outside her building. She takes the pot upstairs, knocks out the old plant, and plants one of the bean seeds from the pan of water.

   Later, as she is cleaning her apartment, she stops to look at the plant. We see (in color) the new shoot bursting forth from the soil. Then we see four shots of the plant at different stages of its growth.

4. The next four scenes (in black and white) show her caring for the plant, protecting it from several dangers. Later, we see her working in the narrow hallway, where she notices the light coming through the skylight. The filmmaker shows ten brief shots of the plant, positioned in several different locations in the hallway; it is clear that the old woman has moved the plant each time so that it will have more sun.

   She goes to the park again (in color). But this time she brings the plant with her, hidden in her knitting bag. She sets it on the sidewalk in front of her, looking at it proudly, and protecting if from anyone who wanders too close.

5. At home (in black and white) she stops her work for a moment to examine the plant. She looks out her window and sees the blue sky (filmed in color) above the four walls. With a determined look in her eyes she picks up the plant.

   We see her (filmed in color) take the plant to the park again. Watching out for the gardeners, who are weeding the flower beds, she finds a likely spot, removes the plant from her sewing basket, shakes it out of the pot, and plants it among the flowers. Satisfied, she sits back to enjoy her string-bean.

   Several scenes follow, some in her apartment, and some in the park, as she follows the progress of the plant's growth in its new location. While she is in the park, the gardeners go about their business in the background. With each visit, the plant grows stronger and even sends forth new string-beans.

6. One day at the park, however, she sees the gardeners huddled over the string-bean. We see her in the background, as one of the men violently uproots the plant, throwing it into his basket. When they walk off, she approaches the basket, lifts up the plant, and examines it closely. Without hesitating, she picks off several mature beans and walks away.

   Returning home, and clutching some of the beans tightly in her hand, she walks directly into the kitchen (in black and white) and takes down the old flower pot. Smiling, she puts one of the seeds from the beans she had picked into the pot, covering it with dirt. Then she opens the window and sets the pot on the sill. When it begins to rain, she opens the window again and moves the pot closer to the edge, watching her new string-bean carefully as the rain water fills the pot, moistening the soil.

--1964, CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 17 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What qualities of aging are revealed in this short film?

2. What did you admire the most about the old woman's character?

II. The Woman's World.

3. How does the old woman make her character known to viewers in the first scene of the film? (Remember: she speaks no dialogue in the film.)

4. How does the environment we see the old woman living in at the beginning of the film affect our attitude toward her?

5. Can you remember any images, either in the black and white or in the color scenes, that had a strong visual impact on you?

6. In what way is the park a contrast to the old woman's apartment?

III. The Woman and the String-Bean.

7. How is the old woman's relationship to the plant like the relationship of a mother to her child?

8. Why does the old woman bring her plant to the park while it is still in its pot? Later, why does she plant it in the park?

9. How did you feel when you saw the old woman watch the gardeners uproot the bean plant and throw it in their basket?

IV. The Film as Symbolic Statement.

10. What do you think the plant comes to mean to the old woman?

11. Did her actions after she saw the plant uprooted by the gardeners surprise you in any way?

12. What do you think the film's ending was meant to convey?

13. How does this film provide a definition of what might be termed "The Great Circle of Life"?

14. What does this film have to teach us about our attitudes toward our own aging?

V. General Questions.

15. What did the filmmaker accomplish by employing both color and black and white photography in the film?

16. What touches of humor does the filmmaker include to reveal some of the idiosyncracies of the old woman's humor?

17. Did you notice some of the ways the music in the film complemented the meaning of particular scenes?

18. What statement does the film make about the needs of older people?

19. How could this film be used appropriately for audiences interested in the religious dimensions of human experience?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Before viewing this film, make a list of at least four positive and negative characteristics, qualities, or traits you associate with older people:

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________

You may have a few minutes to compare your list with those composed by others in your group. Keep these traits in mind as you view the film. Focus on the experiences of the old woman in the film. After you have viewed the film, make another list below. This time note the positive and negative characteristics, qualities, or traits exhibited by the old woman in the film.

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________

Compare your two sets of lists and consider the following questions:

1) What did your lists have in common? How did they differ? How do you account for those similarities and differences?

2) Did you have any difficulty noting either positive or negative traits in either list? If so, why do you think that was the case?

3) What do you think this film can teach us about our attitudes toward aging? (For example, to what extent was the old woman in the film a role model for others to follow?)

INTRODUCTION

In this deceptively simple film a three-generation family goes on a picnic in the country. As the parents set up the food, the grandfather sits in his favorite chair under a large tree while the young son runs playfully in a nearby meadow. After they have eaten, the parents pack up, then along with their son say good-bye to the old man, and leave him behind, seated in his chair. After the family leaves, we see other old people, sitting in chairs apart from each other at different points along the hillside. What are we to think? If we view the action of the film metaphorically, we conclude that the old man has been "put out to pasture" by his family, just as the other old people we see at the end of the film have been left behind after similar picnics.

The film suggests that the family is acting out the consequences of a ritual that has been set in motion sometime in the past and now has become part of the fabric of this familial and societal system. Here the expected thing to do is to discard the oldest members of a family when they have outlived their usefulness. Simone de Beauvoir comments on this bitter ritual in The Coming of Age (1970), when she notes the meaning of one of Grimm's Fairy Tales: "A peasant makes his old father eat out of a small wooden trough, apart from the rest of the family: one day he finds his son putting little boards together. 'It's for you when you are old,' says the child. Straight away the grandfather is given back his place at the family table" (p. 49). Unfortunately, the child in Weekend does not break the tragic circle that has been set in motion in ages past. The old man is abandoned, the family returns home, and someday in the future this ritual of abandonment will be repeated, with the son disposing of the father just as the old man was left behind by the family at the end of this film.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Because the ending of the film is intensely dramatic and crucial to a viewer's overall understanding of the film's message, it is advisable to ask those viewers who have seen the film before not to give the ending away. Let those who have not seen the film before experience the ending by themselves. Likewise, do not divulge, in your introductory comments, the ending of the film.

2) Note the absence of dialogue in the film. Encourage your audience to follow the meaning of the film as it is provided by the visual information. In fact, suggest that dialogue might get in our way in this case. Note that the absence of dialogue tends to emphasize the universality of the subject matter rather than pointing out a specific instance of human experience.

3) Editing is a film technique that often unites characters who would otherwise be dissimilar or unrelated. Your audience should be able to discover early in the film which characters' experiences are being compared, should be able to follow them through the rest of the film, and should discern the significance of that comparison by the time the film ends. You may want to follow up on this point in the discussion after viewing the film.

4) Ask your audience to watch closely for several key images or scenes in the film. In each case the image or scene should be associated with a climactic moment. Even the music will reinforce the climactic nature of the material. You may want to comment on some of these central images or scenes after showing the film:

--In Scene 7 the old man is seated in his chair as the family says good-bye to him. As the young man reaches up to embrace him, notice the mother, standing to the left of the frame, turned away from this show of love. She is obviously suffering a great deal. The structure of this image suggests that this is a final good-bye.

--The last scene of the film also conveys a great deal of emotion. When the family leaves, the audience may think the film has come to an end. Leaving the old man alone in the meadow represents a cruel act done to one man by one family. But when the filmmaker returns to the meadow to pan across the entire hillside, showing many older people who have all been left alone in their chairs, the audience understands that the old man is no more than one of many rejected, abandoned elders, left behind by their families because they were expendable.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Extreme long shots of a city, with its many rooftops; then the camera moves in toward an apartment building. Suddenly we are inside a room. We see closeups of bedroom slippers, medicine bottles, pills on a table, then an old man sitting in a chair. Dressed in a t-shirt and pajama bottoms, he is looking out the window. A buzzer sounds, apparently from a radio. The door to the room opens, and a young boy enters, pulls a chair up to a high cabinet, and stands on the chair as he rummages among bottles on the top shelf, looking for marbles to play with. The old man watches from the background.

   Suddenly the marbles cascade to the floor. The boy's father enters, pulls the boy up from the floor, and takes him out of the room. After the two leave, the old man stoops to pick up a large marble and holds it up to the light.

2. The boy's mother appears suddenly. She is dressed in a housecoat. She helps the old man back to his chair, hands him a glass of milk, and leaves.

The scenes that follow show the family preparing for a picnic! The parents pack food, shave and dress the old man, help the young boy with his clothes, and take a few moments to ready themselves. Meanwhile, the boy takes his container of marbles to the car, and the old man spends a few moments looking at the marble in his hand again.

3. The music changes when the father carries the old man's chair away. Outside their apartment, we see the chair, with a formal high back, strapped to the top of their little car. As the car, rolls down city streets, then into the country and finally into an expensive meadow, the music offers a mournful accompaniment.

4. We see the young boy running across a field of wild flowers, then watch the father unload the chair and carry it halfway up the hill. Following the old man's directions, he sets it down in the low grass near trees. A brief scene shows the boy, sitting alone in some high grass, playing with his marbles.

5. The family eating their picnic meal. The old man, seated in his chair, eats voraciously. Afterward, we see the family sleeping. The old man is still in his chair. The car radio is blaring in the background. The father wakes up first, shuts off the radio, then goes off into the field to relieve himself. He returns to help the old man out of his chair, then assists him in relieving himself apart from the others. Meanwhile, the young boy plays in the meadow.

6. The sad music we heard earlier is repeated, as we watch the parents methodically pack up the picnic items. The old man, seated again, seems to want to help in some way, but he is ignored by the others. Soon they are finished. The boy returns from his play. Then we see a tableau: everyone is standing in front of the old man, who remains seated. First the father extends his hand, and the two men shake hands formally. Then the mother puts her arms around the old man's neck and embraces him. Last, the boy approaches the old man, shakes his hand, then reaches up to kiss him. The old man holds tight for a moment as the mother turns away in the foreground, her eyes downcast. The father tugs at the boy's arm and draws him away from the old man.

7. The car drives out of the meadow and joins the traffic on the main road. Then in a closeup we see the old man holding the marble up to the light. He is smiling. Then he lays his head against the back of the chair, a pensive expression on his face.

   We see two scenes of traffic on the road, then return to the meadow. The camera begins to move to the right, showing first one, then another, and then another old person, each seated in a chair on the hillside, until we realize that the entire hillside is dotted with old people sitting in their chairs, all at some distance from one another. The last shot is of the old man, the grandfather of the family we had seen earlier, and as the camera pulls back, we see him sitting alone beneath two great trees.

--1973, Mass Media Associates, 11 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. Were you surprised by the last scene in the film? (Scene 8) What do you think it was intended to convey?

2. The film seems to suggest that a "vicious circle" is in operation in this family's disposal of the old man. Why is the young boy the key character, the one who may be able to break that circle and make a different choice in the future?

II. Visual Symbolism.

3. How did the opening shots of the film, ending with an image of the old seated in front of the window, establish the mood for the film?

4. How did you feel when you saw the old man's chair strapped to the top of the car, then watched the car leaving the city and heading into the country?

5. What image stands out in your memory about the farewell scene (Scene 6)?

6. In Scene 8 why does the filmmaker portray all the older people in the meadow sitting at some distance from one another? What did that overall image remind you of?

III. The Boy and the Old Man.

7. What does the marble the old man holds onto throughout the film reveal about his character?

8. How do the marbles serve as a link between the young boy and the old man?

9. What do you think was the point of the scenes showing the young boy running in the meadow and playing with the marbles apart from the others? (Scenes 4, 5, and 6). Can you compare the action in these scenes with others in the film?

10. What was different about the farewell between the old man and the boy, compared to the farewells between the old man and the middle-aged couple?

IV. A Family on a Picnic.

11. How are the mother and the father alike? How would you compare the basis of their relationships with the boy and the old man?

12. Did you notice any patterns in the way members of the family interacted? How would you account for this?

13. Who is suffering the most in the farewell scene?

14. How was the farewell scene (Scene 6) typical of this family's pattern of interaction?

15. What effect do you think this picnic will have on the young boy?

16. When did you first realize that the old man was going to be abandoned by the family?

V. The Film's Statement of Ideas.

17. If the film had ended after Scene 7, showing the old man holding up the marble to the light, what statement would that ending have made? What was gained by adding another scene (Scene 8)?

18. What statement does the film make about the ways in which custom or tradition control the basis of our interaction with others?

VI. General Questions.

19. As you viewed the film, did you think the old man was the woman's father or the man's father? Why?

20. What do you think is the significance of the title, Weekend?

21. How did the music contribute to the overall mood of the film?

22. Which characters did you personally identify with most in the film? Were there any scenes you were able to identify with as well?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET A

After you have viewed the film, think about some of the ways the young boy and the old man are compared through the action in the following scenes. In each instance, consider these questions:

1) What are you able to conclude about the basis of their relationship?

2) What do you think the filmmaker wants to communicate by comparing the experiences of the two characters at these points in the film?

MARBLES The boy gathers up the marbles in the old man's room, puts them in the car, plays with them in the meadow. / The old man finds one of the marbles in the room, holds it up to the light. He holds up a marble when he is alone at the end of the film.

PREPARATIONS The mother dresses the boy hurriedly, then takes a moment to fix her hair. / The mother gives the old man a glass of milk, dresses him, and shaves him.

THE MEADOW The boy is shown running through the tall grass of the meadow. / The old man remains seated in his chair and watches the mother and father clean up the remains of the picnic.

THE FAREWELL After saying good-bye, the parents lead the boy up to the old man. The boy reaches up to embrace the old man. / The old man embraces the boy, who then is pulled away by his parents.

SAMPLE WORKSHEET B

After viewing this film, you are undoubtedly aware that it does not simply recount a family's picnic on a weekend afternoon. You may recall there were four scenes that suggest something more is happening than meets the eye. Review each of these scenes, which are summarized below, and then consider the following questions:

1) What was it about that scene that seemed unusual, suspicious, or suspenseful? Do you remember if the music helped you to note any difference in mood?

2) How did you respond to that sudden realization that the film was shifting its meaning or intentions?

4) Were there other scenes that alerted you to the different direction the film was going to take?

THE CHAIR-- The father loads the old man's chair on top of the car. Accompanied by haunting music, their car rolls down city streets on the way out of town.

THE CLEAN-UP--After the picnic, the parents move quietly and methodically to remove all of the refuse. The old man, seated in his chair, appears to want to help, but no one suggests that he do anything.

THE FAREWELL--Suddenly the parents say good-bye to the old man and push the young boy toward him for a final embrace. The mother turns away in the foreground, her eyes downcast. The father pulls the boy away from the old man.

THE HILLSIDE--The family has left the old man behind. Then the camera begins to move across the hillside, and we see one old person after another, all seated apart from each other, each in a favorite old chair.

The Wild Goose

INTRODUCTION

This film, like a senior-power version of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, exposes in a humorous way the negative stereotypes of aging that result when we exert unremitting control over older people in our society. The setting: a nursing home in the country. The action: we begin with a silly birthday party where the old people are treated to cartoons and made to act like children--all, that is, except one--an old man in a wheelchair. This independent spirit, a "Wild Goose," is scornful of his treatment by the staff, and he leaves the party in disgust. But his individuality is squelched by two husky nurses, who retrieve him and then restrain him in his bed. This pattern of individual expression repressed by the power of societal control is repeated throughout the film. Each time we see examples of the qualities of the Wild Goose's humor, imagination, and inventiveness he is subdued by his caretakers. Finally, the Wild Goose plots to escape the flock, and to the delight of the other "inmates" in the nursing home, he rides off into the distance--appropriately on Easter morning.

Throughout the film the basis of the Wild Goose's interactions with staff and with other residents is a means of commenting on stereotypical attitudes toward old people, of helping us see the humor in everyday situations, and of poking fun at some taboo subjects--such as sex and religion--in the context of institutionalized care. The film's often irreverent attitude toward its subject may at first upset some people. Its intent, however, is to encourage us all to consider the individual qualities of older persons rather than viewing them only as members of a narrowly defined group.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

Many people feel that The Wild Goose is a delightful, even hilarious film, but others may feel uncomfortable with its often irreverent treatment of older people. I think you should prepare your audience for the film's humorous treatment of its subject matter rather than saying nothing beforehand.

1) Tell your audience that the point of much of the film is its humorous treatment of life in a nursing home, as shown from one patient's point of view. The film should not be taken too seriously, then, since that would negate the point of view taken by the filmmaker. In fact, the characters and situations probably have nothing in common with real older people or with typical residents in a nursing home.

2) Ask your audience to relax, then, and to watch for the many parodies of situations encountered by residents in a nursing home as they are portrayed in this zany production.

The Wild Goose

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The film begins with a scene from a silly cartoon, showing two mice boxing. When this film clip ends, we hear party horns--noisemakers. A woman--apparently the activities director at a nursing home--walks across the bright screen and says, "There! Hasn't this been a wonderful birthday party?" We see a quick shot of three old people, dressed in silly party hats, frantically waving noisemakers.

   They all begin to sing happy birthday. But the camera moves down the aisle to shown an old man in a wheelchair, glowering at the assembly. He bleats his noisemaker scornfully and rolls away, slamming the door.

2. When he leaves, the woman in charge nods to two stout nurses stationed nearby and they pursue the old man (hereafter the Wild Goose), who is moving down the hallway at a fast clip. Eventually they retrieve him, and as they tower over him, we can see his gloomy reaction to his captivity.

   The nurses slowly push his wheelchair back down the hall. As they move toward us, their procession is accompanied by a slow, lilting song performed by a soprano: "Old rockin' chair got me, cane by my side; fetch me that ginseng, before I tan your hide. / Can't get from his cabin, goin' nowhere; just sittin' here grabbin' at the flies round my rockin' chair."

   The nurses roll him into his room and tuck him securely into his bed as we hear the last verse of the song: "Old rockin' chair gets it, judgment day is near; chained to my rockin' chair."

3. The Wild Goose has visitors, his family. They stand around his bed, looking down at him. The father says, "You're lookin' good, son." His mother greets him, but the Wild Goose ignores them. His mother gives him a picture puzzle of the Madonna to keep him occupied, but he seems more interested in the young, attractive nurse standing at the foot of his bed, taking notes on his chart. When his family leaves, he lunges at her and pulls her down onto his bed.

4. A dinner scene, the camera moving slowly to the left, showing all the people listening devoutly to a prayer being spoken. In the background we can hear someone slurping food--the Wild Goose. The dinner begins in earnest, and before long the Wild Goose has stolen someone's food. Later, he initiates an olive-throwing episode and ends up accidentally smacking his neighbor on the head with one. When his neighbor objects to this rude display, the Wild Goose slaps him on the back, as if to say, "Come on, that wasn't so bad, was it?" The man's false teeth fall out onto his plate.

5. Three brief scenes follow, highlighting our prankster: slow, majestic music ("Pomp and Circumstance") opens the first scene. We look through an open doorway, while out in the hall we see first one, then another old person in a wheelchair, slowly wheeling down the hall past the door. When we see a slight older woman barely crawling past the door in her chair, we look twice--and see that the Wild Goose has hooked his cane to her axle for a

free ride. Next we see a brief scene showing the Wild Goose and one of the two stout nurses in a tug-of-war over his urinal pan: the nurse loses. Last, we see an old woman leaning out of a doorway, dropping her handkerchief like a checkered flag and yelling, "Go!" We hear strains from the "William Tell Overture," as we see the Wild Goose and another man racing down the hall in their wheelchairs.

6. We change to a slower scene, showing a fat woman reading boring poetry. (Look close: she is the same actor who is playing the Wild Goose.) The audience is inattentive, even unresponsive. The reading is punctuated by the ring of someone spitting tobacco juice into a can--we can guess who is doing that. Finally, this poetry reading is disrupted by a coughing fit--the Wild Goose again. We see him being rolled out of the lounge by the same lithesome nurse we saw earlier. Before long we see the Wild Goose again, this time chasing the nurse down the hallway. But this devilment ends when we see a young male aide quietly pushing him down the hallway.

7. The Wild Goose in bed, a glum expression on his face. A friend visiting him asks, "Do you wanna get out of here?" Later, his friend conspires to help the Wild Goose steal a lawn mower.

   Accompanied by spooky music, we see the Wild Goose and his friend fearfully peering out of a doorway in a darkened part of the building. They sneak down the hall, and as the scene continues, we follow them through all the stages required in building an ingenious and original contraption--a gasoline-engine-powered wheelchair. At the end of the scene, they sit before their invention, looking like conquering heroes.

8. Outside the building, a minister stands on the steps, droning on about the beauty of Easter Morning. A small group of residents is seated in chairs in front of him. Inside, the friend helps the Wild Goose start his engine. The hallways are quiet. Outside, the minister pompously preaches while his audience snores. Inside, the Wild Goose zooms down the hallways. The two stout nurses march in step side-by-side, unaware of his presence. Before they can stop him, he rounds a corner, runs them down, and keeps rolling on.

   Outside, the minister is preaching fervently: "And behold, there was a great earthquake, and the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone!" From behind the minister we see the doors open and the Wild Goose open his throttle. The audience wakes up and gasps. Some of them stand up. The Wild Goose rolls down the steps, knocking the minister aside. The minister looks up and groans, "Jesus Christ!" Hearing his "cue," an assistant nearby puts a record on the record player and the "Hallelujah Chorus" begins to play as the two nurses chase the Wild Goose down the road. The old people stand alertly, waving their canes and cheering him on. Some even wave from their windows. The nurses can't keep up, and they stop running. The Wild Goose drives off into the distance toward the sunrise, free at last.

--1975, Films, Inc., 19 min.

The Wild Goose

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What scenes in the film made you laugh? When humor was employed in the film, did you feel that it made a point or was appropriate in context? Did you ever feel it was in poor taste? Why?

2. Were you uncomfortable with the way older people were depicted in the film? What aspects would you have liked to have seen changed?

3. Identify what you consider were the stereotypical characters in the film. What made them stereotypes?

II. An Original Character.

4. What did you like about the character the Wild Goose? What didn't you like about his character?

5. Is the portrayal of the Wild Goose a negative stereotype, or is it meant to combat negative stereotypes?

6. Do you think audiences will be able to identify with the character of the Wild Goose?

7. Were you made to feel uncomfortable with any of the Wild Goose's pranks? What do you think the director intended to convey in those scenes?

8. When does the Wild Goose feel most alive as a person? When does he feel least alive and vital?

9. Did you find yourself rooting for the Wild Goose in the last scene of the film?

III. "Old Rockin' Chair Got Me."

10. After the two nurses capture the Wild Goose, we see them pushing him back to his room and hear a song (See lyrics in Scene 3). How did that song set the mood for the rest of the film?

11. How would you characterize the activities that were planned by the staff for the "benefit" of the older residents? (See especially Scenes 1, 8, and 11). How do those activities compare with the ones the old people thought of themselves? (See especially scene 7).

12. What did the film try to communicate about the attitudes of older people toward the following subjects: nursing homes, sex, religion.

13. What did the film try to communicate about the older person's need for the the following: a sense of humor, creativity, dignity, independence.

IV. The Wild Goose and His Flock.

14. What is the basis of the relationships between the Wild Goose and the older residents of the nursing home?

15. What is significant about the reactions of the old people when the Wild Goose appears in the last scene?

16. What is communicated in the last shot of the film, which shows the Wild Goose driving away in his wheelchair into the distance?

17. In what way does the film depict the Wild Goose as a heroic figure?

V. General Questions.

18. Note times in the film when you were surprised by what you saw. How did those scenes or actions affect you?

19. If this film were ever shown to an audience of nursing home residents, what would you want to make clear to the audience in order to prevent any misunderstanding?

20. Why is the title of the film an appropriate one?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

As you view the film, take note of the many stereotypical portrayals of characters and situations regarding life in a nursing home. References to several scenes are noted below. You you may want to add others that seem appropriate. Consider the following questions that apply to all the scenes.

1) What stereotypical characters or situations are being exposed in that scene?

2) What was funny about the character(s) or situation? What do you think the filmmaker was trying to communicate by using humor in that context?

3) Could you identify with the character(s) or situation? Did it remind you of anything in your own experience?

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY--

A VISIT FROM THE FAMILY--

THE DINNER SCENE--

WHEELCHAIR RACES--

POETRY READING--

RECOMMENDED AUDIENCES:

NAME OF FILM:	pre-school	elementary	junior high	senior high	college	adults	older adults
The Antique Collector		x	x	x	x	x	x
Blessings of Love			x	x	x	x	x
Don't Count - Candles			x	x	x	x	x
The Giving Tree	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Home for Christmas		x	x	x	x	x	x
Roundabout	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
String-Bean		x	x	x	x	x	x
Weekend			x	x	x	x	x
The Wild Goose				x	x	x	x

RECOMMENDED SUBJECT AREAS SYMBOLIC STATEMENTS

SUBJECT AREAS	Antique Collector	Blessings of Love	Don't Count/Candles	The Giving Tree	Home for Christmas	Roundabout	String-Bean	Weekend	The Wild Goose
ageism: dispel myths			x			x	x		x
counseling/psychology		x	x	x		x	x	x	
creativity and aging	x					x	x		x
cultural diversity		x	x			x	x	x	
death/grief education		x	x	x		x	x	x	
ethical issues	x		x			x		x	x
family relationships		x			x			x	
film study / film art		x	x			x	x	x	x
housing concerns	x						x		
intergenerational	x		x	x	x	x	x		
loneliness of old age	x	x	x		x		x		
long-term health care			x					x	x
men's roles		x	x	x	x			x	x
mental health prog.		x	x		x		x		x
religious education		x	x	x	x		x		
retirement concerns	x		x						
sexuality		x	x						x
stereotypes of aging	x	x		x	x				x
urban aging			x				x		
values education	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	
women's roles	x						x	x	

Additional Recommended Films

Crac!

Pyramid Films, 1981, 10 min.

This fast-moving animated film is a memorable story about a lively rocking chair, crafted by hand by a young man who gives it to his bride as a wedding gift. As we follow the adventures of this rocking chair, we follow the "seasons of life" of its owners: the celebration of their wedding, their role as new parents (rocking the child in front of the hearth), their children growing up (and using the rocking chair to satisfy their whims of imagination), and the parents' old age (when they discard what they consider to be a useless old piece of furniture). But this rocking chair has a life of its own. When a museum guard spots it about to be devoured by a garbage truck, he claims it for himself, repaints it, and uses it to while away the long hours spent in one of many large rooms in a museum of modern art that has sprung up on the land near the original owners' home. Seemingly out of place in a museum of modern art, the rocking chair begins to cast its magic spell, first on young children who "discover" it one day and stand in long lines just to sit in the chair, held on the lap of the happy guard, Then the chair casts its magic on the film's viewers: late at night when the lights are out in the museum, it comes to life and dances by itself. As if on cue, the abstract paintings of modern art come alive too. Soon they are transformed into the fast-moving images of the wedding celebration, depicted earlier in the film. As the images whirl about the screen, they are accompanied by lively fiddle music. The swirl of colors and motion stimulates memories of the young man and his bride and their long life together. Suddenly the choreography ceases: the museum guard snaps on a light to check on this disturbance. Before he enters the room, however, the images return to their "abstract" states (within the confines of the framed paintings), and the chair stops rocking. After a look around, the guard leaves, satisfied that all is back to normal. Darkness: and the chair comes alive again--

A Dream About a House

CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 1973, 12 min.

The film attempts to capture the many poignant, dramatic moments of life, which occur in an everchanging tapestry of movement and action. We see the adolescent, the soldier, young lovers, the bride, the dying man--but none of the characters become real to us. They appear at random and disappear without interacting meaningfully with other characters. But the intent of the filmmaker clearly is not to create an ordered universe peopled with believable characters; instead, the images that move in and out of the film remind us that life is neither ordered nor coherent. In fact, meaning resides in the sense of destiny that controls the characters' actions, the lack of communication among characters, and the heavy weight of the movement of time that directs the tempo and even the tone of the film.

The film would be most appropriate for sophisticated film audiences, who have a basic understanding of how film techniques--particularly editing, camera angle, and composition--convey meaning. Interpretations of the film will vary, and facilitators should try to encourage connections between themes suggested in the film and ideas about aging they are hoping to communicate in a workshop setting.

Feiz, the Last Expert

Zagreb Films, 1973, 15 min.

Feiz is an expert repairer of kitchen pots and pans. But his expertise is presented in the context of his trying to find work in a modern urban environment. We see him strap his pot-repairing equipment on his back and set out to locate customers. Before long we can see that he is out of place, an anachronism as it were, a middle-aged family man with two children who walks the streets of the city to find work and who is, for the most part, ignored by the residents of high-rise apartment buildings.

This subtle film never declares its meaning directly to viewers. We have to follow Feiz on his tireless route through the city, listen to him crying, "Fixing pots! Right on the spot! Here is the expert!", and watch him stand below one of the many tall apartment buildings in the suburban area of the city before we realize that the film is making a profound statement about aging. Perhaps the most important idea it conveys is that the expertise of former times depended on human contact, and that interactions between craftspersons and customers counted for something. Late in the film, when we watch Feiz actually repairing the kitchen pot of a older woman in a poor section of town, we gain a feeling for the value of such encounters that adds an insight regarding the meaning of the past.

The film would be useful as an introduction to aging, especially if it were combined with another film that focused on the experiences of complex and believable characters. Appropriate audiences would range from students at the senior high school level to older adults. More structured discussions would be useful for younger viewers.

Hailey's Gift

Learning Corporation of America, 1978, 23 min.

There is magic in this film--shown in the appearance of a mysterious stranger, unannounced one moonlit night. Hailey B., as he calls himself, brings to a young girl, the main character in the film, an important message for all young people: when you "keep track of who you were," you are reminded of "what went into making you who you are." In short, the story addresses young people's need to gain self-confidence and to foster the development of their identity.

The young girl's encounter with Hailey B. is special from the very beginning. She is a dreamer, who keeps to herself and asks, "Who can help me when I wonder what it's like being me?" The answer is provided when she meets Hailey B., who is perceived by her other friends as a ghost, when he is simply an old person who lives apart from others. They try to play a joke on him, but he scares them away. Jennifer is attracted to the old man, and she decides to visit him one day. Hailey B.'s wisdom is supernatural. He tells Jennifer that he knows the names of all the people in the village--"always have." Then he tells her that the practical joke the other children tried to play on him did not anger him. "I never get mad, except when people are trying to be cruel. Not often even then."

Inside his ancient house, he shows her scrapbooks, old records, and other treasures. He knows something about Jennifer that is a secret even from herself. With his help, she understands and accepts a key perspective on her life. She is able to say, "I am glad that I am me." Having helped her make this discovery, Hailey B.'s work is done, and he leaves as mysteriously as he appeared.

The symbolic relationship between Hailey B. and the young girl will appeal to younger viewers, particularly elementary students. But older viewers, including older adults, will be able to identify with the messages presented in the film. An interesting companion film might be Roundabout, which also addresses the child's perspective as it relates to a relationship with an older person. Both films also contain the similar imagery of the carousel, a symbol of childhood imagination and the continuity of life between the young and the old.

Inside and Outside

Iowa University Audiovisual Center, 1969, 29 min., b & w.

Although this film is somewhat outdated and of mediocre technical quality in some scenes, it makes a point regarding the fate of older people in our society. "Inside" refers to residence in a nursing home, whereas "outside" refers to life on the outside, that is, in the context of independent living. As one woman in a nursing home says, "I didn't want to come to a place to die." She adds a note of criticism when she says, "We're still set apart. We're the old people."

Images in the film develop the idea that life on the outside reflects the vitality and industry of people engaged in meaningful activities. In contrast, the imagery of life on the inside, within an institutional setting, conveys a sense of quiet desperation, loneliness, and sadness. As one person says, "There are many lonely people here." But another offers a hopeful point of view when she says, "If you don't have a home, you have to find a place." The film succeeds in communicating the tensions experienced in the lives of older people when they are faced with major changes in their lifestyles. At the same time it avoids making easy judgments and sentimental appeals.

In some ways the film is reminiscent of Don't Count the Candles, because it lets the images and dialogue speak for themselves. It is appropriate for a college audience or an adult audience familiar with gerontology and/or health-care concerns. It might serve as an introduction to the subject matter, but it would need to be supplemented with an additional film or other materials.

The Keymaker

University of Southern California, 1970, 20 min.

This complex film will mean different things to different people. Living alone, a troubled older man seeks conversation and companionship with others, but his encounters with other old people provide him with no sustenance. Everyone seems to have given up the struggle for life--all vital signs in them have terminated. But he is different; he plays with children and does silly things, such as playing with a beach ball or throwing a paper airplane. Still, his attempts to unlock the spirit of play in the others is ignored, and when we see him playing a game of chess with another older man, the latter can only babble on about his physical ills and misfortunes. The main character leaves this scene in disgust, and the film culminates with the old man experiencing a magical regenerative moment after viewing a strange source of light through a crack in a brick wall.

One of the mysteries of the film is that he is drawn again and again to this mysterious light he sees through a small opening in a brick wall. At the end of the film viewers finally see what is inside, and the image they view will lead unddoubtedly to interesting and possibly frustrating speculations as to the story's meaning. The fragmentation and complexity of the film makes it suitable primarily to college and adult audiences, especially students of film technique, but the character's responses to the other older people he interacts with will be accessible to a wide range of viewers.

The Mortal Body

Filmmakers Library, 1976, 12 min., b & w

In this mature film the human body is presented in all of its diverse shapes, forms, and sizes. The opening image graphically announces the seriousness of the ideas that follow: we see a profile of an old man's head, frozen within what appears to be a clear lucite block. When the block pivots, we see a frontal view of one-half of the face, and when it pivots again, we see a profile of the brain and other parts of the interior of the head in a cut-a-way perspective.

But the gruesomeness of the image is not played upon in the scenes that follow. Instead, the film attempts to compare scenes showing healthy, active people engaged in life with scenes that recall the decay and impermanence of all life. We see a poolside scene, where people of all ages are gathered to enjoy some leisure time. The ironic, humorous tone of these scenes is contrasted markedly by the devastating scene that follows: closeups of tags on the toes of corpses at a morgue and closeups of the scars and wounds on one of the bodies. We return to scenes showing more activity--a lover's embrace, sexual union, the physical decline of old age, and the birth of a child--in other words, a commentary on the entire cycle of our existence.

The film ends with a dark interior scene showing a worker breaking up used plaster casts and burning the remnants in a furnace. The film utilizes symbolism associated with decay, death, and renewal in order to suggest that our mortal existence is fragile, temporary, and yet resilient.

The film should be viewed only by adults, and people should be advised that some of the imagery borders on the gruesome. Still, the film offers a stimulating and even thought-provoking presentation of its material for health-care professionals, gerontologists, and other educators.

An Old Box

National Film Board of Canada, 1976, 9 min.

This brief animated film, suitable for audiences of all ages, presents a fanciful view of the mystery and magic that is part of the holiday experience.

A lonely, ragged man finds an old box near a heap of garbage and claims it for himself before the garbage haulers can throw it away. Alone in a small shed in the middle of the city, he opens the box, rearranges something inside, and paints a star on the outside. When he drops a coin in a slot on the top of the box, the box comes to life, playing a Christmas melody and entertaining him.

Suddenly we see a carnival atmosphere replete with revelers performing on a city street. In the distance the little man stands alone next the box. The carnival acts continue noisily for a few moments, and then the group disperses, leaving the old man alone with the box. It begins to snow, and the little man climbs into the box.

We see the entire city below us, and then a green star descends from the sky and drops into the box. Now the box truly comes to life, playing more Christmas music, opening its flaps, and revealing a tapestry of figures who come to life inside: a king stands on a tower; shepherds tend a flock of sheep; three wise men appear; angels hover over the scene; a rainbow of colors is generated.

After these imaginative and colorful transformations end, we see the box again in an alley next to garbage cans. After we have a moment to catch our breath, we witness a final transformation: a blue star comes out of the box, and as it escapes, hands and arms reach out from the box. Then the figure of the little man, like a spirit, rises upward and flies up into the sky, becoming a blue star and following the first star into the heavens. In a moment the garbage truck returns, and one of the haulers snatches the box, drops it into the truck's hopper, and the truck drives away.

The animation used in the film consists of simple line drawings and subtle colors that draw us into the world of the film and hold our attention throughout. The filmmaker avoids either affirming or promoting a specific religious content; instead, he attempts to suggest the universality of the miraculous and the magical in human existence. The film could be used as part of a program on the role of the imagination in old age. Combined with films like Roundabout, The String Bean, or The Wild Goose, the film might supplement the presentation of specific ideas relating to stereotypes of aging, the loneliness of older people during the holiday season, and the meanings older people attach to traditional celebrations.

The Old Woman
Aims Media, 1974, 2 min.

In two minutes this colorful animated film conveys a delightful portrait of an old woman who is too busy to die. Even when death comes to her door, ready to take her with him, she pushes him aside so she can continue her cleaning, make dinner, and work on a quilt. Death, in the familiar guise of a skeleton, follows her around the house, trying to get her attention, but when she begins to sew on her quilt, the camera moves to the right to show us how much she has left to accomplish: we see yards and yards of fabric, all needing to be sewn before the quilt can be finished. Confronted by her remarkably optimistic attitude, Death succumbs and passes out on her floor. She continues her work.

This film would be suitable for audiences of all ages, and it would be particularly effective if used as an interlude between films or other activities that may be more emotionally charged. Its potential for generating discussion also should not be underestimated. Ideas relating to terminal care, hospice, and attitudes toward dying can be examined after viewing this film.

Secrets

Filmmaker's Library, 1979, 8 min.

This bittersweet film portrays the fleeting pursuit of dreams, which are a A young man, sitting in a cluttered room in an abandoned factory complex, turns off an alarm clock and mutters, "We could set the sun by you, you old war horse." He grabs a gray uniform and runs out. We see the man in an old limousine, driving away from the factory. The name "Zinnser" is painted on the bricks of the smokestack in the distance. The car arrives at a spacious building, evidently a convalescent home, and a well-dressed older man, with a white goatee, steps outside to be greeted by his chauffeur (the young man) and taken to his office (the abandoned factory).

In another scene we see a young woman arriving in the city via train. She buys an old-fashioned dress in a costume shop and arrives at the deserted factory to spend the day as the old man's secretary. Inside a large abandoned office, the old man gives the woman some dictation. He shows some signs of confusion, but she ignores that behavior and keeps to her role.

Another woman arrives on the scene. She wears an old-fashioned dress under her modern coat, and we see her in a brief scene with the old man as they eat a fine meal on the dock outside the factory. The man playing the chauffeur acts as their waiter, and at the conclusion of this scene the old man presents the young woman with a fine bracelet.

Later, after the old man has fallen asleep inside, two of the actors chat briefly. The young woman returns what she calls the "crown jewels" to the man, and he gives her an envelope containing payment for her services. The young man, again playing the role of chauffeur, then drives the older man home. When he sees an older woman standing outside, the young man smiles, walks toward her, and the two converse briefly. She is Mrs. Zinnser, and she hands him envelopes for next Sunday's outing. "Keeps us from getting old," she explains. When the young man asks why she doesn't mind spending so much money to maintain the charade, she says, "I get to be alone all day long." In the distance, we see the old man watching his wife and the young man converse. The expression on his face is uncertain and difficult to interpret.

Discussion of this film, which is aimed at mature audiences, will touch on many sensitive areas of aging, including how people deal with the losses associated with old age, how illusions seem to compensate for harsh reality, and how individual needs sometimes outweigh demands of relationships. Some viewers may wonder if the "secrets" in the film contribute to the happiness of the old couple or only deepen their dependence on illusions and exacerbate their loneliness. Whatever the case, careful pre-viewing of the film and a plan for discussion of the ideas raised are prerequisites for using it effectively.

Sticky My Fingers, Fleet My Feet
Time-Life Films, 1970, 23 min.

The hero of this film, Norman, has the slight paunch and receding hairline that characterizes him as decidedly middle-aged, and he possesses one further ingredient we sometimes associate with middle-age--the tendency to fantasize and pursue the elusive dreams of youth. In fact, Norman is one of a group of middle-aged men who relive their youth in weekend games of touch football. We see the men imitate the rituals of professional players as they ready themselves for the field of battle--a corner of Central Park in New York City. Part of the humor in this film lies in the lack of humor these men bring to their play--they take the game seriously. For example, before he leaves for the game, Norman's wife asks, "When are you going to mature?" He answers, deadpanned, "I'm a very mature pass receiver--ask anyone who's tried to cover me."

At the park, the men choose sides. Only one reminder of their mortality exists: a fifteen-year-old nephew of one of the men, who joins them for this one afternoon. As the game begins, Norman, one of the gladiators, catches a few passes and revels in his heroics. His greatness, however, soon is overshadowed by the young man, who outruns, outmaneuvers, and outlasts his older counterparts, including Norman, and spoils their day of fantasy. Defeated, bedraggled, and disheartened, the older men head for home, and Norman admits, "If you live long enough, you grow old." Back at home, however, soothing his aching muscles with a hot bath, he fantasizes again.

Much of the charm of this film can be found in the running commentary Norman provides, in the form of an interior monologue, as the action unfolds. Appropriate audiences for the film would be junior-high students to adults. Discussion of the film might start with reactions to Norman's antics and fantasizing and lead to questions of the nature of maturity, the need for men to demonstrate continued prowess in athletic endeavors, and the obsession the middle-aged have for youthfulness. An interesting companion film might be The Jogger, which consists of one man's interior monologue as he runs the same jogging course over a forty-year period.

Youth, Maturity, Old Age, Death
Encyclopedia Brittanica Corp., 1975, 8 min.

Marcel Marceau recreates his famous pantomime of the stages of life in this poignant film. Poised like a flower ready to bloom, the child struggles to begin life, strides proudly and effortlessly through youth, and then gradually weakens in maturity until he falters, grows smaller, and withers, returning at last to the position he began the cycle with, closed upon itself, at rest.

In a matter of minutes the pantomimist suggests the entire range of human experience. This film would be useful as an introduction to a program that focused on specific issues relating to aging. It would provoke an emotional response and make the audience more receptive for ideas and discussion on specific topics to be presented later. As in the case of the films The Blessings of Love and The Giving Tree, this film condenses one lifetime in order to engage viewers' emotions and encourage them to look at their own experience with a new perspective. Because of its universal portrayal of the subject matter, this film is appropriate for a wide range of audiences.

THE GREAT CIRCLE OF LIFE:

A Resource Guide

to

Humanistic Films on Aging

CHAPTER TWO -- PORTRAITS OF AGING

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INTRODUCTION

Film portraits introduce us to older people who are remarkable individuals with unique qualities of character. The sixteen people featured in the twelve films in this chapter are not noted for being famous people, recognized by thousands of admirers. They are not experts in their "fields," and they do not hold positions of power or influence. Most are simply interesting people who happen to be old. But all of these older people have the capacity to contribute to our understanding of the aging process because of the depth and substance of their character and values. We can learn something about our own lives by understanding the experiences that have enriched their lives.

Four individuals in these films have achieved a moderate degree of fame because of their creativity or originality. Ruth Stout (Ruth Stout's Garden), for instance, became well-known for her philosophy of "no-dig gardening," which consists of using a hay mulch to preserve soil moisture and to provide nutrients for the plants throughout the growing season. Seven thousand people have visited Ruth Stout's garden, and she has spoken to countless audiences, promoting her revolutionary method. Another originator and promoter of new ideas is Bill Underwood (Don't Mess With Bill), a former vaudevillian who developed a simple method of self-defense known as Defendo. He has taught the principles of Defendo to a wide range of people, including police, students, and older persons. Like Ruth Stout, Bill Underwood brings an indomitable sense of humor and unrestrained vigor to his teaching methods. Malvina Reynolds, who achieved fame as a folk singer and composer of many songs, including Magic Penny, Turn Around, and Little Boxes, has continued to act on her political convictions. In Love it Like a Fool she is portrayed as a political activist, committed to changing what she considers to be an imperfect system. Another individual who has achieved recognition for her accomplishments is Bessie Jones (Yonder Come Day), whose insights into the folklore and lifestyle associated with slavery in the South made her an invaluable resource for musicologists and historians. She used her knowledge of slave songs and games, for example, to teach new generations about the oral traditions of slave communities.

Although the subjects of the film portraits noted above have attained a certain degree of notoriety because of their accomplishments, their films were not made to celebrate their achievements alone. In each case the filmmaker acknowledged that revealing the depth of one's character is the first stage in bringing older people to life through film. Audiences want to learn details about their backgrounds and discover insights into their pasts. We want to know where they came from, what their families were like, and what values were passed on to them. We learn more of the substance of character when we hear older people state their points of view on current events, on the meaning of the past, or on the value of personal relationships. Often older people connect the present to the past through reminiscences. We learn their philosophy of life, their wisdom gleaned over time and tested by experience. These aims are clearly expressed in the four films mentioned earlier, and they are a central feature of the films At 99: A Portrait of Louise Tandy Murch, Luther Metke at 94, and Lila. The film portrait of Louise Tandy Murch emphasizes her vivacious spirit and zest for living. The film begins with the celebration of her ninety-ninth birthday party, and later scenes follow her activities: we see her playing the piano and singing for older people at a nursing home, performing her daily routine of exercises, and shopping at a health-food store. Louise Tandy Murch expresses freely her philosophy of life: "Happiness is a perfume inside you, on a shelf; when you sprinkle some on others, you spill some on yourself." Her celebration of life is matched by the lifestyle of Luther Metke, whose pioneer spirit and homespun philosophy make Luther Metke at 94 an endearing film portrait. Although Luther Metke lives alone in a log cabin in Oregon, the filmmaker portrays Luther as a man who thrives on building new relationships. Throughout the film we see him reestablishing old acquaintances and making new friends. Like Louise Tandy Murch he enjoys reciting his own poetry, and he is quick to affirm the values that have guided his life: "As long as we do the best that we recognize is the best, that's the only thing I can say." Lila Bonner-Miller, the subject of the film portrait Lila, is another person who has lived her life according to a well-defined set of values. In fact, Lila uses the phrase "stories to live by" to characterize those values. Some of her "stories": "Fear God and love the church, share with those who have less, women and men get equal education." Lila's own story is a fascinating example of a person who has lived according to the values she articulates. A practicing psychiatrist in Atlanta, Lila Bonner-Miller also finds time to participate in a free meal program and a woman's support group as part of her involvement with her church.

Learning to regard older people as individuals requires an unfolding of their idiosyncracies as well as a revelation of their philosophy of life. When we learn about some of their idiosyncracies, these people become more believable and complex individuals. We see, for example, their sense of humor, their interests in hobbies, their sentimental attachments, and sometimes even what might be considered their "failings." All are aspects of character and all tend to individualize the older people featured in these films. Knowing these older people as individuals helps us to avoid negative stereotypes, which we apply when we consider people as part of a separate, well-defined population. This revelation of idiosyncracies in character is featured in three films in the chapter. In each case filmmakers have chosen what might appear to be an unlikely subject for a film portrait. At first glance Kenneth O'Donnell, from Last Stand Farmer, seems to be a stereotypical craggy Vermont farmer, who prefers to use a horse-drawn plow rather than modern farm machinery. But as viewers become acquainted with Kenneth O'Donnell, they realize that he has taken a "stand" on the values that are inherent in the relationship between a farmer and his land. His choice of horsepower rather than machine power becomes a testament to his values, and when we see him speaking fondly of his team of horses, we realize the depth of his commitment. In other words, he views his lifestyle in the context of former generations of independent Vermont farmers, and we are able to sympathize with his plight when we realize that it is being threatened by many of the pressures of modern society--such as rising farm taxes--that are being brought to bear upon that lifestyle. Spike Van Cleve, the subject of Spike: A Montana Horseman, enjoys a similar commitment to his environment, but it is expressed for him in the special relationship with his horse, Sam. As he says, "When I'm riding with Sam, it's like being in God's pocket. Nothing can happen." Spike and Sam are inseparable, a union of the human being and the natural world, and his horse represents the source of the values he lives by. At one point he says, "A man could learn complete honesty from a horse." His strength of character and his sensitivity are reflected in his devotion to a way of life--characterized by the Western values of individual freedom, independent action, and personal integrity--that is vanishing from the landscape. A third example of how character is revealed by incorporating the idiosynracies of the individual is Murita Cycles, an affectionate, and sometimes trenchant, portrait of the filmmaker's father, Murray Braverman. The subject of this film portrait appears to share little in common with all others in this chapter. His idiosyncracies include wearing greasy clothes, seldom bathing, and filling his house with pieces of junk gleaned from various "treasure hunts." His family often objects to his anti-social behavior and his uncouth ways, but he is unruffled by their criticisms, and he has little use for traditional definitions of success. He goes about what he terms "the business of living" in his own inimitable style, running a junk shop out of a large garage. The filmmaker renders him as he is, a man who has simplified his life, stripping away what he considers the needless complexities of excessive ambition, materialism, and fame, and choosing a lifestyle that fits his concept of self.

Two other films in this chapter offer perspectives on aging that complement the films noted above. The Art of Age is an appropriate introduction to the topic of film portraits because it highlights the experiences of four older people who respond enthusiastically to their post-retirement years, becoming involved as volunteers in community agencies, establishing new interpersonal relationships, and expressing themselves with creativity and vigor in their old age. The film Nell and Fred differs from the other films in this chapter because it emphasizes the unique relationship between two older people who live together. Both are widowers, and Fred has been a long-time boarder in Nell's house in Montreal. The filmmaker succeeds in conveying the dynamics of their special relationship. Nell is a domineering but lovable woman who believes that she is looking after Fred, who is an older man. But the filmmaker suggests that Nell needs Fred as much as she thinks he needs her. When Fred gives up his room at a new senior citizens residence and returns to live with Nell again at the end of the film, we sense Nell's excitement at this reunion. Although their long-term housing needs remain unresolved, viewers will respond warmly to their delightful interaction throughout the film.

The film portraits in this chapter represent a wide range of values, including the value of sustaining relationships, the importance of remembering and passing on traditions, the value of hard work, appreciation of the land and the environment, and the value of promoting self-esteem in others. This sampling of values these older people live by indicates the diversity of responses they make to life and to relationships and confirms the filmmakers' intentions to reveal them as complex and idiosyncratic characters, capable of growth and change. The twelve films in this chapter provide ample evidence for this claim. The subjects of these films share many common qualities. All have continued to lead active lives. Although a few are slowed by poor health or by physical disabilities, they still maintain independent existences. For the most part, they are in touch with the meaning of their pasts, and they offer fresh, invigorating perspectives on life. Now they embrace life realistically, and often optimistically, passing on some of the wisdom and values that have marked their own experience.

The Art of Age

INTRODUCTION

This film attempts to present a well-balanced, realistic portrayal of the imagination and creativity expressed by older people. Although all of the people in the film are past "retirement" age, they have continued to renew and focus their energies, initiating new contacts with others and refining their interests in hobbies or avocations. Each of their stories represents a positive example of how older people can overcome negative stereotypes.

The film presents an upbeat message about aging without losing sight of the complexities of individual character and interpersonal relationships:

1) The film portrays a few characters in depth and with a moderate degree of subtlety rather than representing the experiences of many characters superficially.

2) Although only one of the characters is an artist in the traditional sense (the sculptor), the "art" of the other three people, arising from their skills and creativity, offers us an opportunity to view the "art of age" across a wide range of temperaments and commitments. In other words, the "art" of each persons's age arises from the fabric of his or her life.

3) Each of these people is committed to personal relationships. One of the men engages in volunteer work for a community agency, and the other man volunteers for a local school; one of the women fosters teacher/student relationships, and the other woman writes letters to many friends.

In order to emphasize the similarities between the four older people, the filmmaker compares their stories through editing. The black man's comments serve as a general introduction to the experience of all four people. Each one has decided that "death will take care of itself. What you want to try to do is to live." After a visual introduction to all four people, section two focuses on the importance of a hobby, or an avocational interest after retirement. All four people are shown participating in and/or describing the interests that have helped them cope with aging. Section three develops some of the areas of interest introduced in the previous sections and provides examples of significant interactions between the older people and others close to them. In section four the characters restate the value of their own experiences and indicate how others may learn from their experiences. The final section synthesizes the story of these four people by focusing on one unifying symbol--their hands. The "art of age" is revealed in the rhythmic movement of their hands, communicating, laboring, holding, gesturing, waving, writing, touching.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask members of your audience how different older people respond to their upcoming retirement. What are some of the reasons their responses differ? To what extent have older people prepared for their own retirement? Ask members of your audience to share their recollection of "successful" stories of retirement (or perhaps their own). What factors made those individuals' retirement successful and/or fulfilling?

2) Note that the film presents the stories of four people who have made diverse adjustments to their retirement needs. Ask members of your audience to note what the four people depicted in this film share in common as they face retirement.

3) Although most of the film is presented through a straightforward narration of the four older persons' experiences, the ending of the film incorporates an interesting film technique that attempts to compare and integrate the four stories. In scene 5 thirty-nine separate shots are combined, focusing on the hands of all four people. Accompanied by the varied rhythms of guitar music, the images incorporate the actions and gestures we observed throughout the film. Each image concentrates our attention on the hands as symbols of the "art" of each person's age, particularly as it is exemplified in their qualities of personality and character. Each time we see an image of a person's hands, we can respond more sensitively to their patience, compassion, good humor, friendliness, and good works. Each image also provides us with a link to an earlier scene. The combinations of these shots evoke a mood, integrate earlier scenes, and summarize the filmmaker's intentions. The four people portrayed in the film "speak" to us in a universal language, their hands a living symbol of the accomplishments of their age.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The film begins with scenes showing four retired people, all actively engaged in their retirement. We begin with a black man, whose hobby is fishing. We see him cleaning fish in his yard and philosophizing about his retirement: "A lot of people my age are unhappy because they don't think about living. They think about dying. I think death will take care of itself. What you want to try to do is live." We see in turn three other retired people, two women with artistic talents, and a man who is a volunteer tutor at an elementary school.

2. The volunteer tutor arrives at a grade school, where he participates in a program utilizing the talents of older people in order to help children with learning disabilities. He considers this work "of great importance."
We see the fisherman at work in his yard. He considers "some type of hobby is important to older people because "usually we wear ourselves out with our inactivity."

A woman at home is shown tatting, skillfully moving her hands to create patterns with the thread. Retired for thirteen years, she is writing an historical novel and regularly corresponds with friends. Afflicted with a crippling bone disease, she faces the pain with remarkable optimism.
Another woman is featured. She is a sculptor, who enrolled as a full-time student when she retired eight years ago. Now 76, she is shown working in various media: clay, stone, metal, plastic, and wood.

3. All four people are shown in action: we see the volunteer tutor at work with a young boy at school, helping him improve his reading ability; then we see the fisherman-philosopher speaking to a community group.

The sculptor is shown working with many young artists, who visit her workshop and learn new styles of art from her. She says, "The way I enjoy young people the most is to give them a chance to show what they can do."

The woman at home, visited by a friend, speaks with determination of being able to face her suffering: "I'm more likely to cure my doctor than he is to cure me," she laughs.

4. The black man says, "I don't consider myself retired. After it comes to the point when I can't help others, can't work in the church, and can't work in the community, then I'll consider myself retired."

As the sculptor molds tiny clay figures with her hands, she encourages others to identify and to realize the artistic element in their own natures.

The volunteer tutor, shown outside his school, suggests, "I almost feel I am going back to school again and relearning the things I had forgotten."

The woman at home continues her conversation with her visitor. After talking about the implications of her own physical decline, she concludes, "When I discover I'm not dead, I think, 'Well, what do I do next?' "

5. Guitar music begins, and we see a sequence of interrelated shots, all close-ups of the hands of these "artists" of age--the sculptor, the fisherman and community volunteer, the volunteer tutor, and the woman at home. Finally, the rhythm of the music changes, and we see a longer series of shots showing their hands in action, the editing following the fast-paced rhythm of the music. This section concludes with closeups of the four people.

--1972, LSB Productions, 27 min.

The Art of Age

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What do these four stories have in common?

2. In what ways are all of these people "artists"?

3. What are some of the ways this film would be effective in addressing negative stereotypes toward older people?

4. How are the four people's stories examples of successful aging? Which individual impressed you as the one who adapted to his/her retirement most effectively?

II. The People.

5. Which of the four people do you think had to make the greatest changes after his/her retirement?

6. Do you think these four people represent an accurate cross-section of older people?

7. To what extent is work an important part of each of these people's lives? Which scenes in the film showed this importance most effectively?

8. If a sequel to this film were made, focusing on the experiences of one of the four persons we saw in The Art of Age, which person would you want the sequel devoted to? Why?

III. The Art of Age.

9. What do you think is the meaning of the title of the film, The Art of Age?

10. What did the ending of the film, showing the interrelated shots of the four people's hands in action, communicate to you about these four people, about the subject of aging, or about the prospects of retirement?

11. What do you think is the message of this film for people who have either retired or who are about to retire?

12. How are the stories of these four people relevant to the needs and concerns of religious groups? What parts of the film would you choose to emphasize in that context?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET A

As you view the film, note some of the significant comments made by the four people featured in the film. Consider their statements that reveal their attitudes, values, or philosophy of life. If you have time, write those comments below, under the appropriate space, or wait until after you have viewed the film to recollect the most significant comments you have heard from these four people.

When you have completed your note-taking, consider the following questions in a discussion format:

1) What did these four people's comments have in common?

2) What attitudes and values regarding retirement and/or the aging process are suggested by their comments?

3) In what ways were all of these people "artists"?

--THE FISHERMAN (who is also a community volunteer)

--THE VOLUNTEER TUTOR (who works with the boy)

--THE SCULPTOR

--THE WOMAN AT HOME

SAMPLE WORKSHEET B

After you have viewed the film, the discussion leader will replay the last scene, showing several images of the hands of the four people featured in the film. As you watch this scene, consider the following questions. You will have a few moments to write responses before discussion of this scene.

1) How would you define the mood evoked by this last scene? (Consider the music and images together in your response.)

2) Make a brief list of some of the images of hands featured in this segment and note some of the qualities you would associate with those images.

	IMAGE	QUALITY
example:	man holding boy's arm	strength, determination
	______________________	______________________________
	______________________	______________________________
	______________________	______________________________

3) Look at the list of qualities you noted, which are based on the images noted in the scene. What do those qualities have in common? Ask other viewers to share some of the qualities they noted. Do you notice similarities between their list and yours?

4) How does the last scene of this film integrate and/or summarize the action shown in earlier scenes?

At 99: A Portrait of Louise Tandy Murch

INTRODUCTION

After watching this film, it will be hard to forget Louise Tandy Murch, who at 99 has remarkable energy and imagination. The film opens with Louise playing her beloved piano and singing "Accentuate the Positive." Although her voice quavers at times, she performs the number with a twinkle in her eye. Throughout the film we see a woman whose enthusiasm for life is an inspiration to everyone around her. She appears to have accepted as her mission in life transmitting the spirit of happiness to as many people as possible. In one scene we see her playing her piano at an outdoors gathering for senior citizens, where her strong voice, good humor, and zest for life carry the day. She isn't afraid to share her philosophy of life either, and she sprinkles some of her favorite sayings about "the good life" throughout the film.

In a delightful scene she shows us how to stay physically fit. Wearing her exercise outfit, she does stretching exercises on a yoga board and beams, "It feels so comfortable--it stimulates the blood." As to growing old, she says she is not afraid of death. When she gets tired or depressed, she says, "I lie down and have these happy memories." Louise Tandy Murch is one of those rare people who are busy living out the philosophy she espouses, accentuating the positive and inspiring everyone who interacts with her.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask members of your audience to remember the oldest person they know who is still living. Allow some time for discussion of who that person is, how long they have known that person, and what stands out in their memory of that person. Perhaps allow some time for discussion among groups of three or four people in the audience. Follow up on this question after showing the film in order to compare their memories of specific older people and their impression of Louise Tandy Murch.

2) Ask members of the audience what they expect to see in a film called *At 99: A Portrait of Louise Tandy Murch.* Perhaps prepare your audience by asking them to write down on a card two or three responses to the words "At 99"--try to elicit responses that refer to attitudes or values toward growing old. Such an exercise might be done in conjunction with the sample worksheet later in this section.

At 99: A Portrait of Louise Tandy Murch

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Louise in a closeup, reading a poem: "Spread joy to the maximum, / Bring joy down to the minimum; / Have faith--or pandemonium / Surely will come across your way!" The poem leads into a song, "Accentuate the Positive," and we see her begin singing as she sits at a piano. She sings with a quavering soprano, her head held high.

   Seated at her kitchen table, she discusses her attitude toward life: "I don't mind being 99," she tells the woman interviewing her. "If I wasn't 99, you wouldn't be here. So there are compensations!"

2. Friends and family crowded behind a table a Louise's 99th birthday party. A large cake with eleven candles, each candle representing nine years, has been placed in the middle of the table. Louise says, "Let's all wish something." Then she blows out the candles, and we see her playing the piano while others sing along.

3. Louise explains the importance of music in her life: "Music is harmony and beautiful tones. You can't see music . . . that's why I think it's so much more spiritual." We see her playing the piano and singing for older people at a nursing home. Everyone is gathered on the lawn, and we see many of the older people in the audience, listening to her play. Louise comments, "I just try to help them."

   Addressing her audience, Louise espouses more of her philosophy: "Happiness is a perfume inside you, on a shelf; when you sprinkle some on others, you spill some on yourself." Then she adds, "And that makes you happy." She sings another song about happiness to the tune of "Edelweiss."

4. Louise on an exercise board in her living room. She is dressed in tights, and as she performs her routine of exercises, she comments on the value of the slanted board in redistributing the blood throughout the body. Part of her routine includes holding her legs over her head, doing the "bicycle" as she supports her hips, and raising one leg at a time to stretch the muscles of her thighs. "Oh, it feels so comfortable!"

   She hops off of the board and continues her exercise, stretching her arms, even bending down to touch her palms to the floor. As she moves her body, there is an intense expression of concentration on her face.

5. She shops at a health-food store. She tells a friend, "I haven't had a headache for fifty years." She also quotes one of her favorite epigrams: "Drink your tea, remember me; drink it hot, forget me not! Sincerely yours, and cheerio--Louise Tandy Murch!" In the store she talks with friends and warns one woman: "No white sugar!"

6. Louise in her kitchen, answering questions often asked older people. When asked, "Do you ever feel lonely?" she says, "I'm alone--but not lonely. There's a difference!" She laughs. "And I have my piano for my companion."

7. How does she feel about death? She handles this question easily, and when asked about her feelings toward immortality, she says she believes in reincarnation. If she could come back again, she says, she would be a singer.

   We see her for a last time at the piano, playing the tune "Edelweiss" and singing lyrics addressed to happiness. While she sings in the background, we hear more of her philosophy: "When I get tired, I lie down, and I have these happy memories. If I do regret some things, I don't want them to spoil my life. You've got to think happy!"

--1974, Sunrise Films, 25 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What did you see in the film that did not fit the stereotypical views we sometimes have of older people?

2. If you were telling someone about this film, and that person had not seen the film, what would you say about Louise Tandy Murch?

II. At 99.

3. How did you feel when you saw Louise Tandy Murch, a woman of 99, entertaining people in their 60's, 70's, and 80's at the nursing home?

4. Early in the film Louise says, "I don't mind being 99. If I wasn't 99, you wouldn't be here?" What do you think she means by this statement?

5. What was your reaction when you saw Louise Tandy Murch run through an exercise roiutine, including some stretching exercises on the slant board. How does that scene help characterize her? What does this scene tell us about her attitude toward aging?

III. Making Music and Thinking Happy.

6. What do you think music means to Louise Tandy Murch? How has her life been affected by her commitment to music?

7. According to Louise Tandy Murch, why is music a special way of bringing happiness to people?

8. At the end of the film Louise Tandy Murch says, "When I get tired, I lie down, and I have these happy memories." What do you think is the "secret" of this technique?

9. What do you think Louise Murch means to communicate to all people --young and old alike--about the subject of happiness? What exactly does she mean when she refers to happiness as "perfume"?

10. Are there any aspects of Louise Tandy Murch's philosophy of life that you will take away with you after viewing this film and try to incorporate in your own life?

IV. General Questions.

11. Were you surprised by any of Louise Tandy Murch's answers to questions she was asked about loneliness, death, and immortality?

12. How do you think an older audience would react to this film? Do you think they would react differently than an audience of young people?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Before viewing the film, take a few moments to write down responses to the following questions:

1) What do you think are some of the positive aspects of being 99 years old?

2) What do you think are some of the negative aspects of being 99 years old?

After viewing the film, compare your listing of positive/negative aspects of being 99 years old with the film's portrayal of the lifestyle, attitudes, and perspective of Louise Tandy Murch. Consider the following question:

3) How does Louise Tandy Murch's experience "at 99" address either the positive or negative aspects of aging you noted above?

After discussion of the above question, consider the following question:

4) Are there any aspects of Louise Tandy Murch's philosophy of life that you will take away with you after viewing this film and try to incorporate in your own experience?

Don't Mess With Bill

INTRODUCTION

Don't Mess With Bill is a refreshing film that engages the viewer's interest with its lighthearted tone and fast-paced structure. On one level it is a film about Defendo, a simple method of self-defense that can be employed by the average person, and is particularly appropriate for older persons, who are often victims of crime. Bill Underwood, 82, is the originator and promoter of Defendo, and we see him at work in many scenes, teaching a diverse clientele the fine points of his art of self-defense. But the star of this film is Bill--not his Defendo method of self-defense. After watching him interact with other people, reminisce about his days in vaudeville, and poke fun at the world, we are left feeling considerable affection for Bill Underwood, an amiable fellow with an indomitable sense of humor, who doesn't take himself too seriously.

Fortunately, the film captures Bill's lively character by not taking itself too seriously either. The opening scene introduces Bill in a brief dramatized skit replete with graphics like "Zap!" and "Bam!", right out of the Batman comic strip. The filmmaker complements this lighthearted approach by using old-fashioned titles that announce the subject of upcoming scenes and adding stirring vaudeville-era music that underscores the rousing spirit of our character. The film's strongest dimension is in its revelation of character. After viewing this film, we remember vividly Bill's emotional attachment to his wife, his unlimited sense of humor, and his commitment to Defendo as a means of improving the security and self-esteem of all people, including the old.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Begin by asking your audience what they expect from a film with the title, Don't Mess With Bill. Then tell them that the person referred to in the title, Bill, is 82 years old. What do they expect now?

2) Consider asking your audience if they have ever heard of the Defendo method of self-defense or of its originator, Bill Underwood. If no one has heard of this subject, consider telling them that Bill Underwood is 82 years old. Rather than stopping to discuss this point, go on to the film and return to the point during discussion.

3) Another suggestion: Consider telling your audience that the film reveals one man's response to his retirement. Ask your audience to consider what types of reponses older people make to their retirement. What would they consider an unusual or unique response? Tell them the film offers some answers to this question.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We are introduced to Bill in an unusual way. A brief scene is dramatized. Two young thugs wait for a victim in a dark alley. An old man approaches (that's Bill). They threaten him, but he fights back, easily disabling them. They flee, he shakes the dust from his hands, and smiles. "That'll teach 'em" is flashed on the screen.

   Several quick scenes follow. In each scene Bill, a stout man of 82, throws down would-be attackers.

   Bill Underwood, philosopher: "Old age is in your mind--if you let yourself believe that you're old. Everybody says, 'Don't do that, Grandpa.' I say, help yourself."

2. We learn that Bill and his wife were married 52 years. She died a year ago. We see photos of his wife and him, and he recalls that after her death he started teaching his system of self-defense, known as "Defendo," so that he could keep busy. That activity was better than "feeling sorry for myself."

3. Several scenes follow, which reveal Bill's teaching and his sense of humor. "I'm the Colonel Sanders of Defendo." We see him instructing policemen on basic Defendo grips, recounting how he taught the Las Vegas police force "and walked out with a pocketful of money," and leading a group in a girl's school. "Every day is a holiday."

   More of his sparkling wit. "Defendo is like ballet. There's no physical effort." He laughs easily and some of his kidding is aimed at himself. "I've got this imaginary tree outside the door, and I hang all my worries on it. I never take them in the house."

4. Sitting in an empty theatre, Bill recalls working in vaudeville in the early 1900's. He speaks fondly of those days, and remembers seeing the great Houdini perform. Then he lies down on the stage and recounts a story of a stage accident that contributed to Houdini's untimely death. "I still have my muscles, and I'm still here." He slaps his stomach and jumps up."

5. After a brief scene showing him teaching a young woman how to disable an attacker, he gives advice sprinkled with a liberal dash of humor. "I have no intention of giving up this wonderful life. I'm only 82."

   Bill talking in a closeup. "I've always said a woman is as old as she looks, a man is old when he stops looking." Another big smile. "If I ever get married again, I'd line up all those widows . . . there are sixteen, and they're all concerned about me . . . and I'd say, 'Which one has the most money?'" He laughs.

6. While the closing credits come up, Bill recounts his future plans: "I've got 75,000 security men in Great Britain interested in taking the training. You get the hula girls going on the beach at Waikiki and I'll go down and train them myself. I don't need any help!"

--1979, Wombat Productions, 11 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. Do you feel the film captured the essence of Bill Underwood's character? What is your impression of Bill Underwood after viewing this film?

2. How could this film be used as a means of counteracting negative stereotypes of aging?

3. What do you recall as the most humorous part of the film? Did you feel the humor employed in the film was appropriate for its subject?

II. The Defendo Method.

4. Did Bill Underwood make you a believer in Defendo? After viewing the film, are you interested in learning more about this method of self-defense?

5. What do you think is Bill Underwood's essential message to older people, regarding their capacity to defend themselves?

III. Bill's Secret of Life.

6. What do you think Bill meant when he referred to the "imaginary tree" he kept outside his door? How does this reference help us understand his character?

7. When you saw Bill recounting his early days on the vaudeville circuit, what did you think those memories meant to him?

8. What are some of Bill's "secrets" to enjoying life at the age of 82?

INTRODUCTION

This film portrait documents the lifestyle of a craggy Vermont farmer, who has chosen to work the land as his ancestors did rather than to adapt to modern mechanization. Kenneth O'Donnell takes his "stand" on the values that are inherent in the relationship between a farmer and the land as well as the relationship between a man and his horses. He values the traditional means of farming even though his determination to adhere to the old ways makes him one of the "last" of a class of farmers that is passing from the landscape.

The film, then, is about traditional values and about the inevitable loss of a proud lifestyle. The filmmaker portrays these ideas by creating a varied and fluid style, combining scenes showing Kenneth O'Donnell going about his daily activities with comments that reveal his character and strength of purpose. In these scenes (scs. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, and 9) Mr. O'Donnell is not talking to us directly. Instead, his recorded comments are played while other images are shown. In this way the filmmaker establishes appropriate contexts for the viewers to hear Mr. O'Donnell's statements of values. Here is a man whose life revolves around work. He is at work in almost every scene of the film, and it is unusual to see him resting in scene 8. The filmmaker makes use of this context by letting us overhear what appears to be his thoughts as he sits quietly in the house. We hear him recount a recurring dream that has been troubling him. The dream is a metaphor for what he considers a losing struggle to maintain his farm in the face of rising taxes. His fear that he will have to sell his farm someday weighs heavily on his mind. It is easy to understand why he expresses such a fatalistic attitude in the last scene, noting, "You don't have to slip but just once and you'll lose the whole thing."

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask if anyone in your audience knows someone who shares Kenneth O'Donnell's background as a small farmer who still uses horses instead of self-powered machines and who subsists on a small acreage of land. Ask your audience what they might expect from a film that focuses on such a farmer.

2) A structural element that adds to the ideas being expressed in the film is the use of the changing seasons as the fundamental unit of the film's composition. The film begins in the spring, follows Mr. O'Donnell through the summer into the harvest season, and ends with a scene in the depth of winter, showing him caring for his horses in the barn. We see him at the end of another year, perhaps the last year he will own the farm, making what may be his "last stand."

3) Note that scene 6 shows the butchering of two hogs. The scene includes images of a workman shooting the two hogs with a gun and sticking them in the throat with a knife. If you think your viewers will be upset with this material, consider having them look away from the screen at that time or allow them to leave the room momentarily. As part of discussion after viewing the film, consider some of the ways that scene is appropriate for this film portrait.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We see an old photograph of two young boys, and as Kenneth O'Donnell's voice begins, the camera moves in to focus on one of the two boys, Kenneth as a youth. We hear him recall a time he fell through the ice as a child: "I slipped and went down into the hole. I had long hair clean to my shoulders. My brother pulled me out of the water by the hair. If it hadn't been for that, I'd gone under, and my troubles would've been all over."

   A closeup of the old man's hands working the gears of his horse-drawn plow. He is dressed in a white T-shirt, wearing suspenders, plowing on a spring day. As he plows, we hear his voice: "You'll find rocks everywhere you go in Vermont. And then they tell the story according to the Bible, he without sin throw the first rock. Well, Vermonters must be damned sinful, because they never pick no rocks."

2. Later, he stands outside, reminiscing about his youth: "I always wanted to do something I wasn't supposed to do." He tells the story of an old plow his brother broke while plowing. When Kenneth mentioned the new plow his father had in the shed, his father said, "You ain't going to take that and break that one too?" But after dinner Kenneth sneaked out to the barn, pulled out the new plow, and hitched it up. Then he plowed the field alone. His father never said a word.

3. He drives an old beat-up panel truck up to a barn so he can put up some hay. "I never owned a new car in my life. The last one I had given to me, so somebody's got to pay me for takin' the next one." He climbs up on the hood and onto the top of the cab. He is dressed in a blue shirt, and has a gray cap perched on his head. As he pitches the hay into the barn, we hear him recall his father's words: "Use everybody just as you want them to use you, and then you'll get along in this world."

4. Standing with his horses in a field, he speaks fondly of them. He lifts one of the horse's front legs to show how gentle the animals are, then rubs and pats the horse's chest. "They're good old fellas," he says. He goes on to talk about his attitude toward mechanization. "I own a tractor. Bought a tractor eight years ago and never drove it. I still like my horses. To hell with the tractor." He laughs.

5. After a scene showing him mowing oats, he again stands in the field, talking about the past. His father died in 1928, his mother in 1924. He took over the farm in 1929 and survived the Depression. "Then Uncle Sam come along and says I want you, so I went into the service and then come back here. I've been here ever since."

   Scenes follow showing Kenneth and his wife, harvesting squash in their garden. She recalls how she met Kenneth and eventually married him when she was 44.

6. Kenneth goes out to feed his pigs. "They say an honest man don't get nowhere, and I think it's true," he says. Then we see a group of men gathered by the pig pen on butchering day. This scene graphically depicts two pigs being shot, then stuck with a knife. The animals exhibit convulsions before dying.

   As the pigs are scalded, Kenneth, standing in the background, says, "The only bath they ever had." As the meat is cut up, we hear Kenneth reflecting on the past: "Everybody seemed to be happy. The world wasn't so fast as it is now." He complains that "they keep crowdin' the poor man down." Later, he objects to the higher taxes farmers like him must pay in order to meet their obligations.

7. Inside the house, sitting alone in a dark corner of the room, Kenneth watches television, although he seems oblivious to the program. Instead, we hear his own voice: "Sometimes I get to dreaming I'm driving a big truck, and it's going down this steep hill, and the lights go out, and I'm putting the brakes on, and I don't know whether I'm pulling the sheets off or what. But just before I get ready to crash, I wake up."

   A winter scene. Kenneth is outside, letting his horses into the barn for the evening. As he walks in the snowy lane, we hear his voice: "It's a hard thing to see anybody who works hard all their life to have a little something and then see them lose it. You don't have to slip but just once, and you'll lose the whole thing."

   Inside the barn, we see him bedding his horses down. He works slowly, methodically, as he has done for years we imagine, and he stops to pat one of the horses: "He doesn't look so good this winter as he did last."

--1975, Silo Cinema, 25 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What do you see as Kenneth O'Donnell's philosophy of life? What are some of the sources of that philosophy?

2. When you realize this is a man who shuns the use of machinery and other aspects of mechanization, how do you feel about him? Do you think he is foolish for using a horse-drawn plow instead of plowing with his tractor?

3. In what ways could Kenneth O'Donnell be stereotyped as the "typical Vermont (or Yankee) farmer"? What would such a stereotypical portrait miss with regard to a full understanding of his character?

II. One Man's Values.

4. What do you think are some of the most important things in Kenneth O'Donnell's life? Why does each matter so much to him?

5. How does his attitude toward his father help us understand his character and values?

6. What is it about the past that Kenneth O'Donnell sees as a positive force, which no longer exists in this modern world?

7. Why has he never used the new tractor he bought eight months ago?

III. A Sense of Loss.

8. What do you think is Kenneth O'Donnell's biggest fear when he thinks about the future?

9. When Kenneth O'Donnell thinks about the difference between life in the present and life in the past, what do you think he sees has changed with regard to the following: neighborliness, attitudes toward work, honesty, the role of small farmers in society.

10. Do you think Kenneth O'Donnell has any regrets about how his life has turned out? Would he have changed anything about his life if he had the choice?

11. At the end of the film Kenneth O'Donnell, feeding his stock in the barn, pats one of his horses and says, "He doesn't look so good this winter as he did last." Why did the filmmaker choose to end the film with this seemingly "offhand" remark?

12. What do you think is the significance of Kenneth O'Donnell's dream about driving a big truck that is about to crash? (Scene 7)

IV. General Questions.

13. Can you remember the opening scene of the film? How did Kenneth O'Donnell's reminiscence set the tone for the rest of this film?

14. How would you characterize Kenneth O'Donnell's sense of humor? Can you recall any scenes that show his sense of humor in action?

15. How would you characterize the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell? Were you surprised in any way by Mrs. O'Donnell's account of their relationship?

16. What do you think the title of the film, Last Stand Farmer, refers to?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Kenneth O'Donnell's story is marked by his many stories about the past. As you view the film, note two or three of the stories he tells in the spaces provided below. (You only need to make a reference in a few words to the particular story.) After you have viewed the film, find out from other viewers what stories they noted, and then consider the following questions:

1) What do you think Kenneth O'Donnell's reminiscences reveal about his character and values? Why does he tell these stories?

2) Did you notice any common themes or patterns in the stories he shares with viewers?

3) Which reminiscence had the greatest impact on you?

Kenneth O'Donnell's stories:

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this film portrait is a vital, articulate eighty-year-old, whose engaging presence dominates the film. Lila is a woman of strong opinions, and when she speaks, it is easy to listen. The theme she comes back to again and again is that we need to help others learn how to help themselves. As she says at the end of the film, "If you know you've got something to give, you stand and give it." This philosophy of life informs her professional practice, her church work, her home life, and her attitudes toward old age. One of the main sources of her philosophy are the values by which she was raised, the truths she calls "stories to live by." By sharing the stories she lives by, Lila encourages all of us who view the film to proclaim our own values and to consider where those values originated in our experience.

Lila's story could have been about a determined woman who was one of the first five women to be admitted to the Medical College at the University of Virginia, or about a woman who made a mid-life career change before that became a fashionable thing to do. But the film does not focus on her career, her achievements, or her inspiration as a role-model for other women. *Lila* is about being eighty and having something to offer to people of all ages. Lila begins by asking, "What is it like to be 80?" Before the film has ended, you will have no doubts about her answer.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

The film begins with a graphic, explaining some of the background information about the subject of this film portrait. You may want to begin by starting the film so that your audience can read that graphic. (See SUMMARY OF SCENES for a copy of the graphic.) Before showing more of the film, stop there and ask your audience the following two questions:

1) After reading this explanation, what do you find unusual or surprising about the information it contains?

2) Based on this information, what sort of person do you expect Lila to be?

In this preliminary discussion, your audience should realize that the subject of this film portrait is an active, career-oriented woman of eighty who has room in her life for family, church, and community concerns.

Lila

SUMMARY OF SCENES

The film begins with the following graphic that provides background on the subject of the film:

> "Lila Bonner-Miller is an 80-year-old practicing psychiatrist in Atlanta. She grew up in Due West, South Carolina, and graduated from Erskine College and the University of Virginia School of Medicine. She began practicing internal medicine in 1924. After raising three children she returned to her medical practice and then began her study and work in psychiatry at the age of 55. She is an active member of the Druid Hills Presbyterian Church in Atlanta and a mother, a grandmother, and a great-grandmother. Today her psychiatric practice is characterized by individual and group therapy and the use of art in therapy."

1. We see her greeting people who have come for a free church-sponsored dinner. As these scenes continue, we hear her commentary: "What is it like to be 80? 75 wasn't so bad, and I knew 80 was ahead of me. So I decided I would enjoy." She recalls the time she realized there were many hungry, lonely people, mostly ex-mental patients, who needed help from her church. "So I thought that our church ought to be blown up if we didn't do something for those people." She addressed the governing body of her church, and they agreed to support her venture--sponsoring a weekly free meal at the church.

2. She recalls her days in college as part of the first class of women admitted to the University of Virginia Medical School, where she overcame the hostility of most of the men and finished her degree. She explains her decision to enter the field of psychiatry and her interest in group therapy. Three brief scenes follow, and we see her summarizing a case of a woman of 50 who overcame her depression by going back to school, interpreting drawings from an art therapy session, and speaking to a group about the role of art in therapy.

3. Lila in social settings. We hear her commentary on aging: "I want people to catch on that growing old can be fun, that you can have exciting times. We let young people sell us a bill of goods. Life is really exciting if you want it to be. But you've got to make the effort!"

   How has she perservered? She notes the importance of five basic truths her family instilled in her: fear God and love the church, everybody works at our house, share with those who have less, women and men get equal education, and don't buy anything if you can't pay for it now.

   Lila speaks into a tape recorder for an oral history project. She recalls the time she decided to become a girl scout leader at the age of 43. She thought, "I'm too old to do that." Then she laughs, "What would I think now I'm 80? But I felt older than I do now."

4. Her attitude toward dealing with depression: "They've got to do something about it. No one else can do it for them." She is excited about her work in psychiatry: "I've done more since I was 50 than I've ever done in my life."

   She recounts how a support group began in her church. She helped continue the group after a paid staff person left. We see the group in action, counseling a young mother whose husband wants a divorce. The men and women in the group offer their trust and support. Lila says, "You need to know where you are and to walk on your own feet."

5. Old photographs show Lila's husband, who was a minister. They were married in 1941, and he died in 1974. "He always treated me with respect."

   At home she comments on the need for all people to realize their potential. "We can stay empty-headed, but if we want to learn until we're 99 years old, we can do it." Does she fear becoming senile? "I'm not going to fool with it!"

   We see her with her family at a Sunday meal. She shares some of her philosophy: "If I'm depressed, I'd better get up and do something about it." We return to the same scene in the church at the free dinner, and Lila affirms her belief that "if we get out of our sheltered, lovely homes and see people's needs, we'll do something." She concludes, "You have to fight to be a person. Because you are old and gray-headed, lots of times they push you aside. But if you know you've got something to give, you stand and give it."

--Ideas and Images, 28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. After viewing the film, do you feel that Lila is a special person? If so, what makes her special to you?

2. What advice given by Lila struck you personally as most important or valuable? Why?

II. Lila's Character.

3. When you saw Lila in the first few scenes in the film, what impression did she make on you?

4. Which scenes in the film contributed most to your understanding of Lila's character and values? Which scenes contributed least to an understanding of her character and values?

5. What do you think was Lila's turning point in her life?

III. Stories to Live By.

6. Lila referred to the stories she lived by. What is another word for stories?

7. Why did Lila say it was important for the individual to name the five stories they live by? What would that have to do with understanding our own aging?

8. How have the stories Lila has lived by helped her adapt to change and resolve conflicts in her own experience?

9. What are some of the stories you live by, and how do they compare with Lila's?

IV. Lila's Therapy.

10. What are some of the ways the film addresses negative stereotypes of aging?

11. What does Lila consider to be the greatest asset of the older person?

12. What is Lila's secret to living a fulfilled life?

V. General Question.

13. In what ways could this film be utilized as a resource for religious groups?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

(Distribute this sheet to members of your audience after they have viewed the film. Give them at least ten minutes to write down brief responses to the following questions. Then form groups of no more than 3-4 people, who can share their responses to those questions. After ten minutes of this small-group discussion, ask the group as a whole to comment on the questions. See Section III in DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for further questions.)

1) In the film Lila refers to "stories to live by." What do you think she means by this phrase? What is another word for "stories"?

2) Lila lists as the stories she lives by the following:
   --Fear God and love the church
   --Everybody works at our house
   --Share with those who have less
   --Women and men get equal education
   --Don't buy anything if you can't pay for it now

Which of the above stories do you live by also? Where did those stories originate in your experience? From your family? From your friends? From your religious background?

3) Which of the above stories are not part of your own experience? Why?

4. Can you list three stories you live by that are not on Lila's list? (List them below.) Where did those stories originate in your experience?

a.

b.

c.

INTRODUCTION

"Who is that white-haired singer?" Answering her own question is 77-year-old Malvina Reynolds, folk singer and political activist, the subject of this film. "The word grandmother puts something on me that does not belong there. It puts me in the rocking chair." Anyone viewing this film will conclude that Malvina Reynolds is not ready for the rocking chair. The film is filled with her music and philosophy of life. As a young woman with a musical background, she found that poetry and music came together in her experience: "Everything I thought began to turn into song." The music she composed includes many famous folk songs from the 1950's, including Magic Penny, Bury Me in My Overalls, Turn Around, We Don't Need the Men, and the unforgettable Little Boxes (1962). We see her performing that number with Pete Seeger, who met Malvina in the 1940's. She sings all or part of seven songs in the film.

The film is less successful at revealing the sources of Malvina Reynolds' character. Although some of the early scenes recall the dominant influences on her developing character, including references to her advocacy of socialism, her occupations before and during World War II, and her discovery of folk music as a medium of personal expression, the film examines those influences only superficially. Many of Malvina's generalizations on the subject of aging lack the originality and subtly viewers may expect from such a film portrait. Malvina comes alive, however, when she performs her music and when she shares her attitude toward performance. At one point she admits, "I'm in love with my audience the way other people are in love with someone else." She reveals her philosophy of life through the lyrics of her folk songs, and through her undiminished enthusiasm for life she offers a positive image of aging.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Before showing the film, play part or all of either Turn Around or Little Boxes for members of your audience. Try to secure recordings done by Malvina Reynolds, if possible. Then ask them if anyone knows who wrote that song or when the song was written. Play part or all of the other song now. Ask again if they know who the singer is. If they do not, tell them that both songs were written by the same person.

2) Consider asking your audience, if they are unsure of the songwriter's identity, to think about the sort of person who would write those songs. Ask them to think about that person's background or values for a moment. Just before you show the film, tell them they are about to meet the songwriter. After they have seen the film, you might want to start by asking them to what extent they were surprised by this film portrait of Malvina Reynolds.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Malvina Reynolds, an attractive white-haired woman of 77, is shown performing before an audience. She sings a folk song and accompanies herself with the guitar. We see old photographs that show members of her family and learn that she was born in 1900 of immigrant parents who were socialists. She worked at several occupations, such as milliner, telephone operator, and industrial worker in a war plant. Her interest in music developed after the war. "When folk music came to the front, I knew that was where I belonged." She adds, "Everything I thought began to turn to song."

2. Pete Seeger, famous folk singer, recalls meeting Malvina in 1946. Although she was not an immediate hit as a composer, she persisted, and eventually began to sell her material.

   Malvina talks about Bud Reynolds, her husband, who was a political activist. We see her singing the song, "Bury Me in My Overalls" (1956), inspired by her husband's life. We hear her singing "Turn Around" (1958), as photographs of children are displayed on the screen; and watch her singing "Little Boxes" (1962) with Pete Seeger.

3. Malvina at a political protest, passing out leaflets and then singing for the crowd. "No matter what age or what your ability, if you get in there and use what you have, your life will be richer, more exciting, more meaningful."

   She addresses the topic of dying, and says, "I hope I go in a big puff of smoke." She sings another song, and part of the lyrics reflect her philosophy of life: "This old world is mean and cruel, but still I love it like a fool!"

4. She talks about her struggle to record an album with her own production company. "Distribution is limited, but at least it's under control." She confides later, "I'm in love with my audience the way other people are in love with someone else."

   A birthday party for Malvina. We hear her say, "I think this country is scandalous in its treatment of the aged." She complains that this "wasteful society" discards "their wisdom, their experience, and the traditions they carry." Later, she criticizes the stereotypical view of her identity: "Some people look at me and all they can see is the gray hair and the aging face. Do you suppose they call Burl Ives the aging grandfather? But me they call singing grandmother. That word puts something on me that does not belong to me. It puts me in the rocking chair."

5. At home, she talks about those who try to change the world for the good. "They have history on their side." She says it is important to become "part of a community working for change." The film ends with her singing from "Magic Penny" (1955). Part of the lyrics: "Love is something if you give it away . . . you end up having more."

---1977, New Day Film Co-op, Inc.,
28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. After viewing the film, how do you think Malvina Reynolds would respond to being categorized in the following ways: performer, activist, grandmother, elderly person, aged composer.

2. When you saw Malvina Reynolds in the first scene of the film performing for an audience, what impression did she make on you?

II. A Commitment to Music.

3. What do you think music means to Malvina Reynolds? How has her life been affected by her commitment to music?

4. Did you have a better understanding of her character and values because of the many songs that were included in the film?

5. What did you see as the primary message of most of her lyrics?

6. Were you surprised to see Malvina Reynolds passing out leaflets at a political rally? How does her music complement her political beliefs?

III. Attitudes Toward Growing Old.

7. What do you think is Malvina Reynolds' attitude toward growing old? What are some of the sources of her attitude?

8. What are some of the ways the film addresses negative stereotypes of aging?

IV. General Questions.

9. What aspects of her character or values would you have liked more information about in the film?

10. How do you think Malvina Reynolds would like to be remembered by people who see this film?

INTRODUCTION

Luther Metke reveals himself as a man of action who after 94 years still is not afraid to learn, to grow, and to change. He is self-confident, yet humble; wise to the ways of the world, yet childlike in his openness to new experiences; a man of strong principles, yet willing to listen to and learn from those who do not share his system of values.

We can identify with him easily because at 94 he is still giving himself to others in relationships. Over the years he has constructed between thirty-five and forty log cabins in the Northwest, and as he tells it, each time someone new was watching him or helping him build. In other words, Luther Metke doesn't build only log cabins. He builds relationships. The film documents the progress of several relationships that are part of Luther's life at 94. Two stand out in the film. We see him working with a young couple, who hope to build their own cabin someday. After watching Luther Metke interact with them, we aren't surprised when they invite him to their wedding. Luther gets along with young people. Next we see a local television station film crew out in the field, following Luther around the site of one of his new cabins, an innovative eight-sided model. Nothing seems to bother him. He is a gracious host, and when we see the feature played on the television news later in the film, we aren't surprised that Luther Metke projects a warmth and honesty that is genuine. As the television reporter says, "He's natural--as natural as the material he uses."

As committed as he is to relationships, Luther Metke seems equally at peace with himself, living alone in his cabin. This aloneness--not to be confused with loneliness--is one way he puts himself in touch with his environment, so much so that we come to view him as if he were part of the natural landscape outside his cabin. Several times he recites poetry he has written, and each time he gives a little more of himself to us. Late in the film he says, "I've got to the point where I can live with myself." Note he says "with myself," not "by myself." At 94 he is still struggling with basic questions people of all ages confront. At peace with himself and comfortable being with others is the way we'll remember Luther Metke.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) The revelation of character in this film portrait is aided by the structure the filmmaker builds into the film. The drama of Luther Metke's life unfolds before us and leads to several climactic scenes. Ask your audience to take note of the film's structure and to identify such related scenes that lead to climaxes within the film. After you have shown the film, your audience should be able to point to the following three scenes as appropriate examples of how the filmmaker structures the material:

--The relationship between Luther Metke and the young couple working with him is climaxed by their wedding, and we see Luther Metke as one of the guests. He mingles easily with the small group, and shows his obvious delight at being there.

--After the early scenes showing the film crew interviewing him, we see Luther Metke invited to a friend's home to view the televised vignette on the local news. In that scene we realize Luther Metke has been "discovered" by a wide audience who can share our enthusiasm for his skills and character.

--The film ends with a celebration in honor of Luther Metke's 94th birthday. Surrounded by his family and friends, he enjoys himself as usual, and stands beaming above a large cake decorated with a cabin and Northwest landscape.

2) Ask members of the audience if they have ever viewed films that focus on the skills and craftsmanship of older people. Films like Birch Canoe Builder, Halvor Landsverk: Woodcarver, Dudley Carter, or The Violin Maker are examples of such studies. Ask if anyone is familiar with those films. If not, ask them to consider what qualities of character they would expect to see in such a film portrait if the film is to go beyond the depiction only of the skills of an older person. In other words, if the film is to portray more than the craft of the older person, what should it emphasize? Some possible responses: values of integrity, persistence, patience, respect for quality of work, commitment to personal relationships, a sense of humor. Ask your audience to consider ways in which Luther Metke at 94 may offer a perspective that goes beyond simply the depiction of one person's skills as a craftsman.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We hear psaltery music, see a closeup of Luther, then see images of the snowy landscape and a cabin in the woods. Inside, Luther is seated near a window, his eyes sparkling, as he recites a poem he has written: "We can not measure morals by the rod, nor the consequence of disobedience to God; from dust thou art to dust thou wilt return, may also be said of the lowly worm." He reads another verse, his fingers tapping on the table next to him to keep the beat. When he finishes, he laughs and says, "That's one of my poems."

2. We follow Luther out to the edge of a woods. He is carrying an axe and a chain saw. He is a small man, bent with age, but he shows signs of great vigor. After examining the trees carefully, he finds one of the proper size and fells it. He strips and peels the log. He says, "I'm a wood butcher. That means you're a rough carpenter, that you can work on logs and so forth

and do a good job." We see old photographs of log cabins and hear his voice: "I've been building these cabins since I was fifteen years old back in Minnesota." He now lives in Oregon.

3. He examines one of the cabins he built; then we return to the cabin he is erecting at present. He notes that each time he builds a cabin--and he has built between 35 and 40--someone new is watching him or working with him. In this case, a young couple are assisting him, hoping to learn enough to build their own cabin someday. "It's just a matter of being able to handle an axe," he observes.

   At home, dressed in a red flannel shirt, Luther expresses some of his philosophy: "There's a lot of serious things in life that aggravates you, but if you have a little sense of humor you can take it. Otherwise, you're in a tough proposition."

4. A film crew is out to take pictures of a new eight-sided log cabin Luther is constructing. Luther's reaction: "I said, 'Go ahead, take your pictures.' But I think the whole thing was that you're ninety-some years old and you're building log cabins. Well, I don't see anything unusual about that." If the crew wants to follow him around, he seems to take it in stride. If they want him to split some logs, he'll do that too.

5. Luther working with the young couple we saw earlier. As for the requirements for cabin building, he says, "Strong in the back, weak in the head proposition." Luther comments on the young couple. "You can't judge people the first day . . . You have to take time before you really find out what their beliefs are." As work continues, he adds, "I thought they was married for several months. Of course, you got to accept what is." He laughs. "It isn't a question of what you think." We see him taking a break, sitting on a child's swing at dusk. "When they said that they were going to get married, I said, 'Now you're talking my language.'" He laughs again.

   At the young couple's wedding, an open-air ceremony. Luther stands nearby with other guests, watching the festivities. We hear his voice, reciting another poem: "Youth looks for things they can explore; they seek the truth through Nature's lore. Created things are plain to see, but the how and why are the mystery."

6. Luther is welcomed to a home crowded with other guests in honor of the airing of the television news report featuring Luther Metke, builder of log cabins. The reporter begins by quoting Luther: "'If you want to do something right these days, you've got to do it yourself.' After seeing Luther Metke work, we've decided he's probably right." At one point in the interview Luther says, "I always make mistakes. We all do. But you can't let that stop you." The report ends with the reporter and Luther walking down a country road. We hear the reporter conclude, "Natural--one thing you can say about log-cabin building the Luther Metke way. He's natural--as natural as the material he uses."

7. After scenes showing Luther in the woods, talking about logging days, we see him at home, preparing a meal. "I'm living here alone because I'm indepen-

dent when I'm alone." Later, reading at night, we hear his voice: "I've got to the point where I can live with myself."

He greets his daughter, who drives up to his cabin on a crisp winter day. His daughter refers to his birthday, which is in February. Luther recalls how he met his wife. His future brother-in-law introduced her in a most outlandish way: "Lou, what'll you take for to marry this girl?" She was embarrassed, but Luther played along: I'll have to think it over and give you a price." Then her brother said, "I don't have anything but an old white horse, but you can have that." He laughs at this story. Of course, his future wife "dashed off mad." Luther says, "That was the first introduction I got." Photographs of Luther and his wife follow, and we learn that Luther took care of his wife the last eight years of her life, when she was in a wheelchair. After she died, he planned to retire, but at 75 he began building cabins.

8. Luther helping a young man fit a window frame on his cabin. "As long as we do the best that we recognize is the best, that's the only thing I can say."

   We see Luther's birthday party, many friends crowded into a room. His cake is decorated with a Northwest scene: a mountain, log cabin, and on top, "Luther . . . 94." They all sing happy birthday.

   Luther inside his cabin again. "I don't worry about death because it's a condition we got to go through." We see his cabin again, as snow falls lightly around it, and we hear him read another poem: "Out of the past we build our future; out of the darkness comes the dawn; out of God's grace we hope to secure courage and faith to carry on."

   Luther seated outside his cabin at dusk on a lovely summer day. As psaltery music begins, he looks at the camera and smiles.

--1978, New Dimension Films, 27 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. If you had to describe Luther Metke in one word, what would you say? Why?

2. What do you see as Luther Metke's philosophy of life? What are some of the sources of that philosophy?

3. After viewing this film, what do you think you will remember most about Luther Metke?

II. Character and Values.

4. Why does Luther Metke value a sense of humor so highly? Can you recall any examples of his sense of humor in action?

5. What did Luther Metke's relationship with the young couple reveal about his own character and values?

6. If Luther Metke were asked to talk about the values of working, friendship, and tolerance, what do you think he would say?

7. What do you think Luther Metke meant when he said, "I've got to the point where I can live with myself"?

III. Builder of Log Cabins.

8. Were you surprised to see a man of 94 taking such an active part in building log cabins? What was Luther Metke's opinion of his own role as a "builder of log cabins"?

9. Why did Luther Metke start building log cabins? What satisfaction do you think he gains from that activity?

10. Why did the television film crew want to make a feature report on Luther Metke?

11. Did you think the television news feature on Luther Metke was an accurate portrayal of his character and accomplishments?

IV. Building Relationships.

12. Why do young people seem to get along so well with Luther Metke? What do you think Luther Metke gains from those relationships?

13. How did you react to Luther Metke's reminiscences about his wife?

14. What do you think the director intended to convey by including the scene showing many people gathered to celebrate Luther Metke's 94th birthday, complete with a fancy cake?

V. General Questions.

15. Can you recall the very last scene in the film? Why did the filmmaker choose to end the film that way?

16. How did you react to Luther Metke's reading of his poetry in several parts of the film? What did the poetry contribute to your understanding of his character and philosophy of life?

17. What do you think this film has to offer for audiences of primarily older persons?

Luther Metke at 94

SAMPLE WORKSHEET A

Before you view the film, note the following list of values. As you view the film, keep these in mind as you evaluate the character of Luther Metke. After viewing the film, rearrange this list according to the way you think Luther Metke would rank each of these values, assigning them either high, moderate, or low priority.

ambition
creativity
faith
fame
humility
materialism
morality
power
sense of humor
tolerance
wisdom
working

HIGH PRIORITY:

MODERATE PRIORITY:

LOW PRIORITY:

--Can you think of other values that were not on the list above and should be attributed to Luther Metke?

--Can you recall specific scenes or examples of dialogue which showed Luther Metke putting those values in action?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET B

After viewing the film, note the following excerpts of dialogue and references to scenes. In the space provided note briefly what each excerpt of dialogue or reference to a scene reveals about Luther Metke's character and/or values.

1) Luther reading from one of his poems: "We can not measure morals by the rod, nor the consequence of disobedience to God; from dust thou art to dust thou wilt return, may also be said of the lowly worm."

2) Luther Metke on building log cabins: "It's just a matter of handling an axe; . . . strong in the back, weak in the head proposition."

3) Luther Metke commenting on the young couple working with him: "I thought they was married for several months. Of course, you got to accept what is."

4) The television news short featuring Luther Metke, builder of log cabins.

5) Luther Metke out in the woods, talking about logging days and the present condition of timber resources.

6) Luther Metke alone in his house: "I've got to the point where I can live with myself."

INTRODUCTION

It is not unusual for a filmmaker to choose as the subject of a film portrait of an older person someone he or she knows well, and it is not surprising that such a person often is a member of the family--a grandparent or parent of the filmmaker, for example. Usually the qualities that are appealing in this subject of a film portrait are ones that are positive and upbeat: the subject should have a dynamic character, be attractive, physically active, creative--often artistic, have inspirational qualities, and have made a great contribution to society.

If these were the criteria applied to Barry Braverman's father, Murray, he would fail the test miserably. Murray Braverman describes himself as a person who projects a "sloppy, disgusting, no-care image." He wears greasy clothes, seldom bathes, and has little use for the traditional definitions of success. But his son, the filmmaker, captures the essence of his father's character honestly and realistically by letting his actions and words speak for themselves. True, Murray is not the attractive, physically active, creative, inspirational older person we have come to expect in film portraits. In fact, the realism of some scenes may make some viewers uncomfortable. One scene in particular shows Murray stripping off layers of greasy clothes and climbing into his bathtub. Despite this dislosure of what might be considered a private, intimate moment, the filmmaker has decided to render Murray as he is, a man who has for many years lived life on his own terms and turned his back on many conventional ways of relating to society. Because he is his own person, and isn't afraid to articulate clear-cut values, viewers can learn a great deal from him--but only if they are willing to put aside first impressions and watch his character and values reveal themselves through the film.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask your audience if any members of their families are known as the "black sheep" of the family. What makes them the "black sheep"? Are they treated any different from the way others in the family are treated? How do their values differ from the values held by the rest of the family? You might note that in some ways Murray Braverman and his son, Barry, both share some of the qualities of traditional "black sheeps."

2) Ask your audience, "If you were a filmmaker and wanted to make a film about a member of your own family, which member of the family would you select as the subject of your film?" What aspects of that person's character or values makes him or her an appropriate subject for the film?

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We see the Staten Island ferry, crowded with commuters. At the dock the people scurry away like ants, but the narrator, who is also the filmmaker, notes that his father is not among those people. Then we see his father, a stout man with a thick gray beard, wearing greasy clothes, walking through the city to his bicycle shop. We hear his voice: "If you could get along on a crust of bread, and be engaged in some occupation you like to do, this crust of bread is a feast. But if you're involved with something you detest, then . . . the next moment is going to bring misery." Arriving at his shop, he raises a heavy garage door installed over the front of the shop and gets set up for business. There he sits, surrounded by supplies and assorted goods. We hear his son's voice: "My father's name is Murray Braverman, and he's been running this shop, called "Murita Cycles," in this way for over thirty years."

2. His father, sitting comfortably in his living room, which is packed with boxes and other objects he has brought home. His son complains, "The place has turned into a dump." But his father disagrees. "Everything turned out pretty good. The sun still shines. The days come and go."

   Murray sets out to find more "junk" for his shop. We see him looking through a garage, then loaded down with findings, walking home. His son's voice: "The shop can no longer accommodate Murray's constantly growing inventory, so new acquisitions wind up in our house two miles away. What follows a junk run is what we call a worship service." Murray returns home and begins to sift through blank computer tape spindles, tools, hardware, mostly useless items. The son says, "More junk." The father says, "Not necessarily." As Murray gingerly steps around the boxes piled high in one of the rooms, we hear the son's voice: "There used to be seven of us in the house, but as we moved out, the goodies moved in--Murray's Fort Knox."

3. Murray sits at the kitchen table, talking to his son. He compares his collection of miscellaneous items to a treasure, like a gold mine. His odds and ends are "gold nuggets," and he mines a little here and there to maintain a subsistence level.

   We see color home movies of the family, showing the mother, who died ten years ago, active and laughing. Meanwhile, we hear Murray say that his marriage combined "an independent, practical person and a dreaming, highly impractical person," but the combination led to a "tremendous harmony."

   We see Murray licking the last of some ice cream from the carton. His daughter's voice: "Are you making movies now? Are you out of your mind?" The son says, "My sister, Lola. She thinks making movies about the family is sick."

   Murray, standing in the kitchen, scratching away at playing a violin. His son asks him about Lola's criticisms: "I can see her point. It's pretty hard to live with all this crap." Murray answers, "The door opens two ways, I always say . . ."

4. Outside the shop we see several person-on-the-street interviews of neighbors, who make varied comments about Murray and his shop, often revealing more about themselves than about Murray's character or reputation. The interviewer is an older man with white hair. The son's voice: "For obvious reasons, I didn't want to interview the neighbor's myself."

   Murray at a wrecking and salvage yard. One of the employees says, "He's about the strangest one that comes in here, but I enjoy him the best."

5. Later, we see him sitting outside his shop. He listens passively as his son complains that he has done no business all day. "There's all kinds of businesses. There's the business of living and there's the business of acquiring capital for your responsibilities."

   We watch from the house as Murray transacts some business on the front porch. When he sees how much money the man has in his wallet, he quips, "Don't carry too much money with you. Give it away quick."

   Murray reminds his son that buying and selling involve a human factor. "The money doesn't come from a machine. It comes from the person. If I can not enjoy that relationship, then the money I take will not satisfy me."

6. Murray taking a bath, peeling off the layer of clothes that seems more like part of his skin than garments that are put on in the morning and taken off each night. He engages in bathing with his customary good humor and philosophizing.

   Murray, dressed in a clean jacket and pressed clothes, makes the rounds at a bicycle trade show. As Murray talks about his lifelong interest in bicycles, we see some clips of old photographs of him as a young man.

7. Repairing a wheel outside his shop, he recalls the origin of the name "Murita Cycles"--a combination of his first name and his wife's first name.

   The son, sitting next to him in the living room, asks about his parents' relationship. "She wanted a house that was relatively clean," Murray says. "I project this sloppy, disgusting, no-care image, and she complained that she didn't want to be seen with me in the house."

8. We see Murray through a doorway, seated at the kitchen table. He reads part of a poem he has written: "Pearls of beauty in your smile, / Not a stone upon your head; / Life is for loving now, / Not for when you're dead."

   Piano music starts. We see old clippings from newspapers, showing the bicycle trip Murray and Rita took on their honeymoon. Old photographs, a closeup of his wife. "None of the family had those big blue eyes."

   Outside his shop, we hear him say, "To me it wasn't important to be a successful businessman . . . it was just to live every day with some kind of satisfaction. There's nothing special about Murita Cycles. But there's something there." He rides off on his old one-speed bike while light snow falls around him. He impishly beeps his bike horn along the way and smiles.

--1979, Direct Cinema, Ltd., 28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. In your opinion, why did Barry Braverman, the filmmaker, want to make this film about his father?

2. What makes Murray an "original character"? Which scenes in the film reveal his originality of character most effectively?

II. Father, Son, and Family.

3. How would you characterize the relationship between father and son as portrayed in the film?

4. After viewing this film, what do you think is the filmmaker's overall attitude toward his father? Do you think he wants the audience to feel the same way about his father?

5. What do you think the film conveyed about the character and values of the filmmaker, Barry Braverman?

6. When Murray recalls his relationship to his wife, he maintains that "tremendous harmony" came out of the combining of their disparate qualities. He adds, "The offspring can take the best of the two worlds and make something out of it." Do you think this has happened in the experience of his son, Barry?

7. Why did the filmmaker incorporate his sister Lola's criticisms of his filming?

8. How would you characterize Murray's attitude toward his wife, Rita?

III. A Choice of Lifestyle.

9. What point was Murray trying to make when he referred to his "junk" as "gold nuggets?"

10. Can you summarize briefly Murray's attitude toward making money? What is unusual about his point of view?

11. Which of Murray's comments made the strongest impression on you? What point was he trying to make?

12. What do you think Murray has lost by holding to his values over the years? What has he gained?

13. Does the film provide any insights into why Murray decided, in his words, to "project this sloppy, disgusting, no-care image"?

IV. A Film Portrait.

14. Do you think the film managed to convey an accurate portrait of its character, Murray Braverman?

15. Which scene or scenes did you find to be most humorous? In your opinion, what was the source of their humor?

16. What did you find to be the most controversial aspect of the film? Do you think the filmmaker should not have included some part of the film? Why?

17. Were you made to feel uncomfortable by any of the scenes in the film? What do you think the filmmaker was trying to convey by including those scenes?

18. Was there another way the filmmaker could have presented this portrait of Murray Braverman? What was gained by having the son be the filmmaker, rather than someone unrelated to Murray?

V. General Questions.

19. Why did the filmmaker include the scene showing Murray reading the poem at his kitchen table? What did you think his poem was meant to communicate?

20. What advice do you think Murray would give to young people regarding the process of aging? What do you think he would say to people his age?

INTRODUCTION

Although this film is non-fiction, the filmmaker creates a vivid, interesting portrait of the two older people by using a structure common to fictional representations. Nell and Fred's life--or that part of their life that is related to their consideration of living in the senior citizens residence--becomes a story, complete with exposition, characterizations, conflict, climax, and resolution. A narrator explains the background, or exposition, of Nell and Fred's story: both are widowers, and Fred is a long-time boarder in Nell's house. Then the narrator steps aside to let Nell and Fred tell their own story.

The two people reveal themselves in several delightful scenes as the plot thickens and conflicts ensue. The question of plot is simply, "Will Nell and Fred move into the new building?" As the film moves to its climax (scene 6), the actual visit to the senior citizens complex, we come to know Nell and Fred and to care about their fate. We see Fred's frustration with the bureaucracy and Nell's ambivalent feelings regarding the move. At the end of that scene, we watch Nell and Fred standing bewildered in the empty room at the senior citizens complex. This, then, is the reality of living in the new facility: a small room, filled with modern, functional furnishings--but not like home.

The resolution of their story follows swiftly: both Nell and Fred reject living in the new facility for different reasons and Fred returns to live in Nell's house. As in the case of a story, the characters have faced a problem, revealing something of themselves in the course of their struggle, and have been compelled to make decisions based on their particular system of values. As the film ends, we realize the uncertainty that faces both older persons; yet whatever the future holds for Nell and Fred, we know they will try to face it together.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Tell your audience that the film is about two older people who must decide whether or not to move into rooms at a senior citizens apartment building. Note that the film is not about a decision to move into a nursing home. You may want to ask members of your audience how familiar they are with such facilities. What kind of accommodations do they think exist for older people? How do such complexes differ from nursing home care?

   Perhaps take a few minutes to ask members of the audience what some of the advantages might be for older people who feel they need to leave their homes and move into such a complex. Also ask them to consider what older people lose when they make such a move. Your audience might find it fruitful to compare their early impressions with what they see happening in the film.

2) Tell your audience that the film also focuses on two unforgettable characters-- Nell and Fred. Much of the audience's response to the film should be devoted to following the depiction of their character and values and the delineation of their relationship.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We begin with a closeup of Nell, a heavy-set woman, seated in a chair in her living room. She reads a poem: "There's nothing the matter with me; I'm just as healthy as can be. My pulse is weak and my blood is thin, but I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in!" She enjoys a good laugh over the poem.

   A narrator explains that Nell, 81 years old, has been a widow for three years, and Fred has boarded at this modest house in Montreal since he retired. A widower, he is now 90. While the film was being made, a senior citizens residence was being constructed outside the city, and Nell and Fred are considering moving into rooms in the building. Then the narrator lets Nell and Fred tell their own story.

2. Fred, a lean and ascetic-looking man, is ready to visit the social service agency, where he can learn information on the new facility. He moves about inside the house, preparing for the visit. Because he is hard of hearing, Nell has to yell at him to get his attention.

   After he leaves, she claims that she is ready to move into the apartment. She doesn't even need to see it first. When the filmmaker asks her what she can take with her from her home, she mentions her canary and her grandfather's clock. "There's just one or two things that tug at your heart, you know."

3. Fred returns home and we see a delightful example of the way they interact. Nell yells for him to bring a chair and sit down next to her, so she can ask him what he thought of the facility. But when Fred sits down, he complains that he didn't see an apartment. Instead, they wanted him to sign up right away. "I've changed my mind," he declares. She interprets that to mean he refused to sign up because he didn't want Nell to be left alone in the house. "Don't make me the excuse for changing your mind," she says. But Fred denies he refused to sign up just to protect her. When she perseveres, he loses his temper and stalks off, muttering, "Oh, I never know what I'm doing right."

   But this seeming conflict is dispelled in the next scene, when we see the two work together to change the paper in the canary cage. All arguing ceases. Fred helps Nell, not complaining about the task, and we realize how much the little bird means to Nell.

4. An older woman visits Nell. While Fred sits patiently in the background, the older woman answers questions addressed to her by the filmmaker, who is offscreen. She is excited about living in the facility: "I certainly hope and pray that I do get in. It's the only place for people like us. We're free to do what we please."

5. Madame Bonet, a welfare worker, and Mrs. Gregory, a representative of the senior citizen's complex, visit Nell in order to work out Nell's application for an apartment. Mrs. Gregory leaves her alone with Madame Bonet because the interviews with potential residents are not part of her job. Nell accepts this technicality, and she warms to the interview with the French-Canadian woman. "I'm a bloke," she says, and later adds, "I like playing cards. I'm a card shark." However, she turns serious when Madame Bonet notices a disparity between Nell's stated income and her probable living expenses. Nell admits, "I have what I'm not going to tell you. I have a small pension from where my husband worked." The welfare worker presses Nell to declare this income. Nell listens patiently to the woman's arguments, but concludes, "When you do these things you don't question people."

6. After a scene at the hairdresser's, where Nell shares her ambivalent feelings concerning her move to the new facility, we see Nell and Fred at the senior citizens apartments. They are part of an audience of older people, listening to the director of the facility. He explains in detail how room selections are made. Then he adds, "The only thing we ask is that people smile."

   On a tour of the building, the director shows one of the rooms to a group of about twelve people. In the hallway, he asks them to look out the windows to the river: "You can see the boats, you can see the children fishing, and you'll have a nice place to spend some time."

   In a brief scene, we see Nell, seated in the hallway, asking the director what she can bring along when she comes. She mentions some of her furniture and also her canary. He answers, "You can have your bird."

   Alone in one of the rooms, Nell and Fred look over the various furnishings. Apparently this will be Fred's room. Both appear uncomfortable, almost bewildered by the unfamiliar environment.

7. We see Nell sitting in a lawn chair outside her house. She explains why she has decided not to move to the facility: "How in the world am I going to spend the rest of my life in this tiny room?"

   Back at the senior citizens complex, we see Fred making up his bed in his room. Then he talks directly to the filmmaker about his financial difficulties, based on the size of his pension, the cost of the room rent, and the $26 he has left to see him through the month. He says angrily, "I can't manage on it."

   Fred strides up to Nell's house, carrying his two bags. Inside, she helps him unpack. He is angry about the experience. One reason: "I didn't like their regimentation." Another reason: "I like my own cooking." Nell teases him about this, but he is in no mood for humor. "It's alright for people who've got money to carry on with, but I haven't!" In a brief concluding scene, we see the two seated at the kitchen table, drinking coffee.

--1971, CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. When this film ended, what were you left feeling about the outcome of Nell and Fred's story? What do you think the future holds for Nell and Fred?

2. Based on their interaction, how would you characterize Nell and Fred's relationship? To what extent did the two "need" each other?

3. How did Nell try to "handle" Fred throughout the film? Was her strategy usually effective?

II. Nell's Values.

4. How does the opening scene, where Nell reads a poem about old age, set the stage for this film? What do you think this scene reveals about Nell?

5. What do you think Nell means when she says, "There's just one or two things that tug at the heart, you know?"

6. Why is Nell's canary so important to her? When the director of the new facility says, "You can have your bird," how did you feel?

7. When Nell is interviewed by the French-Canadian welfare worker, she admits she also gets income from a small pension. The social worker suggests that Nell spend that money while alive, rather than trying to save it for the future. Nell says, "When you do these things you don't question people." What do you think she is really saying here?

III. The Senior Citizen's Home.

8. At first Nell says she is ready to move to the new facility without even seeing it. Later, even after she has visited the home, she decides not to move in. What do you think changed her mind?

9. Why did the older woman, Nell's friend, say that the senior citizens facility is "the only place for people like us"? How do you react to her statement?

10. What was your impression of the senior citizens complex? How did you react to the director's presentation regarding room selections and other details of placement?

11. The viewer experiences two tours of a typical room at the senior citizens complex. In the first, the director shows several people in a room; in the second we see Nell and Fred alone in a similar room. What do you think the filmmaker intended in filming these two scenes in this order? What was different about the two scenes?

12. Did you feel that this institution would adequately address the social and psychological needs--as well as the physical needs--of the older people who would be residents there?

13. Fred gives Nell three reasons why he left the home. Do you think there are any other reasons he didn't mention?

IV. General Questions.

14. In your opinion, why did Nell's grandson want to make this film?

15. Why was the last scene of the film, showing the two drinking coffee in the kitchen, an appropriate way to end the film?

16. In what way does the film avoid reinforcing stereotypical attitudes toward older people?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

When Nell and Fred consider moving into a senior citizens facility, they must weigh the advantages of such a move against the disadvantages involved in changing their residence from a house to a single room in a large building. But the film adds other points of view regarding such a move. Consider the following questions as you view the film. Each question focuses on what older people have to gain or lose when it comes to making their decision.

1) Before Nell and Fred actually visit the senior citizens residence, what do you think they believe they will gain by moving into the rooms? What do they fear they will lose?

2) When Nell's friend is interviewed, she says that the senior citizens facility is "the only place for people like us." What does she see as its advantages? What will she have to give up?

3) When Nell and Fred visit the senior citizens residence, the director speaks briefly to the group and then gives them a tour of the facility. From his point of view, what will the older people gain by living there?

4) After visiting the building, Nell decides not to stay there after all. What do you think changed her mind? Do you think there are other reasons she didn't mention?

5) When Fred leaves the room and returns home to stay with Nell, he emphasizes the disadvantages of living in the building. What bothered him most about living there? Do you think there are other reasons he didn't mention?

INTRODUCTION

Ruth Stout is one of those special people who expresses wisdom through her actions as well as through her philosophy of life. This "guru" of no-dig gardening offers us, in her inimitable way, a short-course in a revolutionary method of gardening. The film's structure complements her teaching by involving the audience directly in several scenes. When Ruth begins to explain her no-dig method, we see her seated in a chair in her front yard. As she speaks, she looks directly at the camera, and the filmmaker maintains that perspective throughout the scene. Our point of view is that of members of an audience, seated in front of her, listening to her tell her story. Similarly, as if to prove her point, Ruth takes us out to the garden and shows us how she plants in the spring. Later in the film, we return to the garden and witness the miracle of no-dig gardening. She fills a basket with evidence of an abundant harvest. All around her vegetables have grown up through the marsh hay she incorporates as a permanent mulch in the garden. When she says that seven thousand people have visited her garden, we are no longer surprised. In fact, by then we may be converts to her no-dig method.

The film is also an effective portrait of an original character because it offers many insights into the background and values of its subject. Ruth's independence, vigor, persistence, and irascibility are all highlighted. She speaks confidently about her gardening discoveries, and she appears at ease with the demands made upon her because of her new-found fame. When we come away from this film, we feel as if we have met and come to know a remarkable person--Ruth Stout.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask your audience if anyone has heard of the "no-dig" method of gardening, where a hay mulch is maintained on top of the ground to preserve soil moisture and to provide nutrients for the plants throughout the growing season. If they are unaware of this method, ask them to consider its merits. Do they think such a method would work?

2) For those unfamiliar with either the method or with Ruth Stout, announce that the film will introduce them to the originator and promoter of a revolutionary form of gardening.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We see several shots of the yard and house where Ruth Stout lives. We hear her explain how she came to live in the country. Born in 1884, she lived in New York City most of her life until she was 45. Then she moved to the country when she married. "We hadn't been here ten minutes when I was out looking at the garden."

   We look at a close shot of an asparagus bed in the garden, and Ruth recalls how she made the discovery of a new method of gardening: one April morning she checked the garden and noticed the asparagus--a perennial--already growing. "I walked over to the asparagus and said, 'We don't have to plow for you. Why do we have to plow for the other vegetables?' And the asparagus said, 'You don't. Go ahead and plant.'" After that "conversation" she decided to stop cultivating the garden altogether.

2. Seated in a chair in her front yard, Ruth explains her no-dig method of gardening. She brags that she hasn't been to a supermarket in fourteen years. The camera remains at long-shot range, and we view Ruth just as if we are members of an audience, sitting in front of her on her lawn. She claims that she finishes all of her gardening, housework, cooking, and answering "a terrible lot of mail" all before 11:00 in the morning. With a twinkle in her eye, she says, "Now your hands are going to go up and ask me what time I get up--between six and eight, according to when I feel like it or want to." She explains that she doesn't plow, spade, weed, hoe, fertilize, or use insecticide or compost on the garden. "I just plant and pick."

3. We see her in the garden. She lifts a bale of hay and picks some turnips that had been in the garden over winter. While planting a row of dill and a row of parsley, she says, "We eat them together, so we plant them together --why not?" She pats the rows of seeds, stands up, and smiles into the camera--"That's it, that's done"--slapping her hands to wipe off the dirt.

   Next she turns to planting potatoes, throwing whole, sprouted potatoes onto the ground in front of her. "Nobody would dream of planting potatoes like this, but I can think of no reason why not--they grow. They come up --and I guess that's what you want from potatoes." She continues her planting: "I'd be willing to bet that 99 out of 100 people who see me do this wouldn't do it themselves--but that doesn't bother me." Then she throws some hay over the potatoes. She can't resist adding a comment: "I don't do anything I don't want to unless I have to--and I don't have to. So there we are!" She explains that the potatoes will grow right through the hay. Why the hay? It keeps the weeds down and also keeps the ground moist. She never has had to water her garden.

4. She recalls her parents, noting particularly the strengths her mother displayed. She never told her nine children "what to do and what not to do." As Ruth speaks, we see photographs of the family, including pictures of Ruth. From what she says, it is clear she had an independent spirit as a child. Her father once told her, "Ruth, it's good to think for yourself, but once in a long time couldn't you think like other people?" When Ruth asked him, "Like who?" he changed the subject.

   More old photographs are shown, as we hear Ruth's voice: "Do what you want to do--and don't tell other people how to behave." She recalls a time when at age 16 she accompanied the famous temperance activist, Carrie Nation, on a protest in Kansas. The highlight of this reminiscence: Carrie Nation was arrested after the protest, Ruth was not.

5. Back to the garden, now at the end of the growing season. Ruth moves about, checking her stock, cutting rhubarb and gathering other vegetables. She notes that seven thousand people have visited her garden. "I don't lecture to garden clubs. I talk for five minutes, and then it's open to questions."

   Ruth seated at a table in her yard, enjoying a glass of wine. We watch several still photographs of Ruth in various poses at the table. She shows enthusiasm and high-spirited character, poking fun at the rules of etiquette: "Did I tell you I was forty-five before I learned that people actually behaved the way other people told them to?"

6. More photographs from the past, this time showing Ruth and her husband, who was "the one man who could have stood staying married to me." One of her unusual behaviors was to go to the garden in the morning, take off all her clothes, and work there for hours.

   More scenes of the autumn foliage in the country near her house. We watch Ruth walking back from the garden, aided by a younger woman. We hear her tell a last story: As a child she grieved because of the death of her brother's dog. When her father saw her standing by a window, watching her brother bury the dog, he called her attention to the rose bush in the front yard, a bush Ruth had planted herself. He showed her a tiny blossom on the bush and told her to pick the bloom. Then, putting his arms around her, he said, "You were looking out of the wrong window, dear."

--1976, Arthur Mokin Productions,
23 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What was your initial reaction to Ruth Stout and to her no-dig method of gardening? How did you react when she went out into the garden to do some planting?

2. How effectively did the film depict Ruth Stout's philosophy of life? What values appear to mean the most to her?

II . Ruth and Her No-Dig Method.

3. After you viewed this film, could you satisfactorily explain the details of the no-dig method of gardening to another person?

4. Has your viewing of this film caused you to think seriously of someday utilizing all or part of this no-dig method?

5. What part of Ruth Stout's no-dig method was of greatest interest to you? What part of her method was most surprising to you?

6. What is Ruth Stout's attitude toward her method of gardening? What does her garden mean to her?

7. At one point Ruth Stout says that seven thousand people have come from all over the world to see her garden. What do you think attracts them?

III. Ruth Stout: An Original Character.

8. If you were asked to characterize Ruth Stout as a child and as a young woman, what would you say?

9. How was Ruth Stout's mother an important influence in her life?

10. At the end of the film Ruth Stout recalls the time her father tried to ease her feelings of grief after the death of her brother. What do you think this story reveals about her values and philosophy of life?

11. How does Ruth Stout's reminiscence about the time she joined in temperance protests with Carrie Nation help us understand her character and her approach to life?

IV. General Questions.

12. How would a younger audience react to this film and to Ruth Stout? Would the reaction of an older audience differ significantly?

13. How did the filmmaker involve the audience in the action of this film?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Each of the following scenes focuses on an aspect of Ruth Stout's character as it is revealed in the film. After you have viewed the film, review these scenes and consider the following questions:

1) Which of the scenes had the greatest impact on you personally?

2) Which of the scenes helped you understand Ruth Stout as a person? How would you describe Ruth's character, based on these scenes?

3) Can you recall anything Ruth said in one or more of these scenes that stands out in your memory? How would you define her sense of humor?

Selected Scenes:

1. Ruth, seated in a chair in her yard, explaining her no-dig method of gardening.

2. Ruth out in her garden, planting a row of dill and parsley and then some potatoes.

3. The old photographs of Ruth as a child and as a young woman. Reminiscences of her parents and stories of her temperance protests.

4. Ruth seated at a table in the yard, enjoying a glass of wine.

5. Photographs of Ruth and her husband. Her story of nude gardening. Her reminiscence about her father's advice when her brother died.

INTRODUCTION

Spike Van Cleve is an articulate spokesperson for a way of life that seems to be vanishing from the landscape. But this brief film portrait is neither a lament for a bye-gone era nor a portrait of the stereotypical cowboy. Instead, the filmmaker allows Spike to express the values he holds most dear: his love of the land, freedom, hard work, respect for the horses that are the mainstay of his occupation, and loyalty to those animals as his faithful companions. His love of horses is expressed clearly in the imagery employed in the film--the lone horseman set against the wide-ranging vistas of the American West. Spike most clearly articulates the value of the horse in statements like, "A man can learn complete honesty from a horse," or "If I wasn't a man I'd like to be a horse." Such declarations appeal to our sensitivity because they are stated with conviction. Through viewing this film, the audience learns to appreciate a way of life and a set of relationships that are foreign to most of us. But after listening to Spike for a few minutes, we are convinced that he knows what he lives by and has integrated his values into the fabric of his character.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask your audience to comment on many of the stereotypical views of the western character as shown in advertising, films, stories, and myth. Ask your audience what they expect from a film that focuses on the experiences of such a person.

2) Ask your audience if they are aware of differences between a "cowboy" and a "horseman" in terms of responsibilities, reputation, or self-image. How do they think the film might differ in structure or content if it were titled Spike: A Montana Cowboy?

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The film opens with the image of a white ranch house in the distance, mountains surrounding it, vast meadows. We hear Spike's voice as he tries to capture the essence of this environment: "Miles of open country, the sound of water in the creek, the sound of the wind." We see him riding his horse, Sam, and hear him savoring the time he spends on the range:

"It's a real good time to think." More scenes of him riding, and he says, "I've heard it said that a man who's completely satisfied has no ambition. Well, I must be an unambitious son-of-a-gun."

2. We see old photographs showing the family with their horses. "We brought good horses into the country," he says. Upbeat harmonica and banjo music accompany images of Spike working the range with his horse, Sam. He expresses his feelings toward working with Sam: "It's the next thing to heaven." He adds that if God had wanted men to walk, He would have given them four feet. As for Spike, he'd rather ride.

3. Out on the range, Spike handles some of the horses and examines a mare and its colt. He speaks with a soft voice, and the animals respond to his presence.

   We see old photographs of his parents and hear him praise his father for being "the only person I ever met who had any conception of what fear for himself meant." He calls his mother a "dandy" who "was a prime example of a person living her own life and never hurting anyone else." We see his wife of forty years outside doing chores as he speaks fondly of her.

4. Spike rubs the neck of his horse fondly. "Friendship between a man and his horse comes from liking them, knowing one another, and being together a lot." We see him riding and hear him say, "When I'm riding with Sam, it's like being in God's pocket. Nothing can happen." He sums up his feelings when he says, "If I wasn't a man I'd like to be a horse." "And I'd like to be a horse like Sam."

   "I've had the best of it," he says, resting next to his horse. "A man can learn complete honesty from a horse." He adds that a "good recipe for living the good life" is to "do the best you can every time you're asked to do it." We see him feeding the animals, and he says, "I've fired men because they took care of themselves before they took care of the horses."

5. Now his day is done. He returns to the ranch, and inside the house he says, "The man who doesn't learn from life is awful dumb." Again we see him riding Sam, and we hear him say, "There are quite a bunch of us, independent, individualists, who say, 'Leave me alone." As he says this, we see him ride over a hill, a silhouette against the horizon.

   Part of the credits include the following: "Produced in appreciation of individual freedom, independent action, and personal integrity."

--1977, Learning Corporation of
America, 11 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. When you saw the title of the film, what did you expect from the film? What kind of person did you think Spike would be?

2. If you had to make a list of the values this man lives by, what would you include?

II. A Man and His Horse.

3. Why was the word "Horseman" used in the title? Why not the word "Cowboy"?

4. Were you surprised to see a person still working with horses in an era when mechanization is predominant? Why doesn't Spike seem to regret not living a life others lead in this mechanized world?

5. What do you think Spike gains from his involvement with horses?

6. Near the end of the film Spike says, "Maybe I have a glorified idea about horses." Do you think that is true?

7. In what way do you think Spike was able to "find himself" by virtue of his livelihood?

III. A Man With Strong Values.

8. What was the one think Spike said that was most surprising to you? What did he say that was most inspiring to you?

9. When Spike described his "space" (his environment), what do you think his description ("Miles of open country, the sound of water in the creek, the sound of the wind") revealed about his character and values? If you were asked to define what "space" meant to you, what would you say?

10. Part of the closing credits includes the following: "Produced in appreciation of individual freedom, individual action, and personal integrity." Where did you see those values portrayed in the film?

11. Spike Van Cleve is on the Board of Directors of the Cowboy Hall of Fame and has written a book, Forty Years' Gatherin's. Based on your viewing of this brief film portrait, are you surprised to learn this information? Does it change in any way your impression of Spike?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Before you view this film, read the following note, which is added at the end of the film: "Produced in appreciation of individual freedom, individual action, and personal integrity."

As you view the film, note some of the images employed by the filmmaker and the dialogue spoken by Spike, the subject of the film, which reinforce those values expressed above:

IMAGES

DIALOGUE

What other values were expressed through images or dialogue? Note them below:

After viewing this film, what would you say Spike means when he says, "You can learn complete honesty from a horse"?

INTRODUCTION

At 72, Bessie Jones is a living treasure, gifted with knowledge of the folklore and traditions associated with slavery in the South. Her knowledge of slave songs and games, for example, makes her an indispensable source for students of this aspect of American history as well as for present and future generations of black people interested in maintaining ties with the past. She lives a quiet life on St. Simon's island, Georgia, where she participates in all aspects of the life of the community, spending time with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, worshipping in the local church, where her son is the minister, and passing on some of her knowledge of oral history to the young people on the island.

But we are introduced to Bessie in this film as she "lectures" to students at Yale University. She performs slave songs and recreates some of the entertainments slaves devised to make their existence more tolerable. The students respond to her material enthusiastically. Prof. Willie Ruff, who invited her to visit his class, also joins in the transmission of these oral traditions, at one point performing a fast-paced duet with Bessie. The scenes in the classroom are informative and inspiring, and Bessie often involves students directly in her teaching.

At the end of the film we see students from Prof. Ruff's class speaking to children at local elementary schools, conveying some of the songs and activities that Bessie presented to them earlier. Their expansion of Bessie Jones's message reflects the black community's growing interest in preserving and communicating many of its oral traditions. (Note: Bessie Jones died in 1984.)

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Tell members of your audience that this film provides information about the folklore and traditions associated with slave life in the South. Tell them they will learn a great deal about how slaves adapted to their harsh life--and their teacher will be a seventy-two-year-old woman, Bessie Jones.

2) Ask members of your audience if they were taught any songs or games when they were children. If so, who taught them those activities? Were any of those activities associated with completing chores or working outside? Tell them to keep some of those activities in mind as they view the film. After they have viewed the film, you might begin by asking them to compare the songs and games they learned as children with some of the activities Bessie Jones explained in this film.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Bessie Jones, a short, sprightly black woman, wearing a colorful dress, lectures to a class in Afro-American Studies at Yale University. A narrator explains that she was invited by Prof. Willie Ruff to "teach his students the songs and games she learned as a child." He tells the students her knowledge is part of the oral tradition of her people.

   She shows students three types of hand clapping, used by slaves as a means of communication. The students clap along, fascinated by her presentation. The narrator says that Prof. Ruff considers Bessie "a teacher in a conservatory without walls." When she asks Prof. Ruff to help her demonstrate one musical combination, she pokes fun at him gently, saying, "I want them to know you can do something too besides read and write." The students applaud wildly at their effort.

2. Bessie at home on St. Simon's island, Georgia, teaching her "grands" and "greats" some of the music of slavery. Then we see her teaching school children on the island some of the games slaves used to play and explaining the meaning of those games. She joins the children outside. They stand in a large circle, and they follow her lead. The narrator says, "This is what she enjoys most--teaching children, anybody's children, the songs and games and the traditions they represent." She clearly enjoys her labor, singing for the children and moving with the music. The narrator explains, "She believes these songs and games will yet survive as long as children find them challenging and fun to play." At one point she breaks into laughter at a silly remark. "That's the funniest thing I've ever seen in my life," she says.

   Later, she tells the children how the slaves made hard work easier by giving their hoes a name and singing to them as they worked in the fields. She mimes hoeing and leads the children in the pantomime, singing a song. Everyone joins in.

3. Bessie at home, putting her great-grandchildren to bed. The narrator explains how important church life is to the people on the island. Bessie's son is a minister at a local church, and we see several scenes of the congregation during a worship service, hear the minister's opinion of the worship environment, and see people "telling how they feel about things, and especially their own relationship to God." These scenes culminate with an outdoor baptism along the shore of the island.

   Then we see Bessie and others gathered for a picnic in the church's backyard. We see the group singing, and the narrator explains, "In the world of Bessie's grandfather, all music was integrated into life, which includes the spiritual." More singing follows. The narrator adds, "We are making obsolete what just might be our greatest treasure--old people. It's from our old people that we may learn what we were and who we are today."

4. We are back in Prof. Ruff's classroom. He introduces Bessie, who is prepared to teach students a slave game. Of course, she involves the students in her

demonstration, bringing some of them onto the stage. She explains the game, and the students play easily, enjoying themselves. Bessie laughs along with everyone and keeps the game moving.

Bessie explains another part of the game and then leads them through it while Prof. Ruff and others onstage offer musical accompaniment. All the students respond enthusiastically.

She shows another game used to help slaves get to know each other quickly. The narrator says, "The important aspect of this oral tradition is the responsibility it places upon everybody." Because the music isn't written down, "each generation is forced to participate and to make an input into the tradition."

Prof. Ruff talks to a small group of students in his apartment. He discusses the difficulty of sustaining an oral tradition over time. He notes how one generation passes on traditions to another "by the laying on of hands."

5. Several of Prof. Ruff's students are shown taking Bessie's message into elementary schools. The children seem to enjoy learning the games.

We see Bessie back on St. Simon's island, walking with children and talking about what she knows best. The narrator defines Bessie's mission in life: "to teach her children, and all chldren, who they are and where they came from." She shows the children a place where Africans drowned themselves, jumping from slave ships, rather than submitting to slavery. This scene continues, and we hear Bessie's son's voice as he talks about his mother's influence on the children. "She's almost like a teenager," he says. We see her lead the children in a folk song.

We return to Prof. Ruff's classroom at Yale. Bessie's guest lecture has concluded, and we see the students begin to leave. But Bessie breaks into another song--"Good-bye, everybody; good-bye, sing Hallelujah!" The students leave slowly, clapping their hands to the beat and smiling at each other. Standing alone on the stage, Bessie sings on until all have gone.

--1975, CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 26 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What did you enjoy most about this film? What feelings were you left with after viewing the film?

2. What do you consider to be the main message the film is trying to communicate regarding the role of oral traditions in our society? Does it suggest what role older people have in transmitting that oral tradition?

3. What do you think are some of the ingredients of Bessie's "magic" as a teacher and performer?

II. Bessie's Message.

4. After viewing this film, what will you remember about Bessie Jones? What do you think the students in Prof. Ruff's class will remember about her appearance as a guest lecturer?

5. Which scenes in the film contributed most to your understanding of Bessie Jones and her role as transmitter of oral traditions? Which scenes contributed least to your understanding of those aspects of her story?

6. What evidence does the film provide that suggests Bessie's "message" is reaching more and more people?

III. Bessie's Character and Values.

7. Are you surprised to learn that Bessie Jones is 72 years old? Did you notice any actions on her part or statements she made that do not fit the stereotypical views we sometimes have of older people?

8. What seem to be the most important areas of Bessie's life? Why is each so important to her? How would you characterize her outlook on life?

9. How do you think most people on St. Simon's Island regard Bessie Jones? Does she seem comfortable with her role?

10. How has Bessie Jones' life been affected by her commitment to passing on oral traditions from the past?

11. After viewing the film, how do you think Bessie Jones would respond to being categorized in the following ways: oral historian, great-grandmother, musician.

12. How would you characterize the relationship between Bessie Jones and Prof. Willie Ruff? Were you surprised at all by any part of their relationship?

13. What did you think when Bessie's son said about her, "She's almost like a teenager"?

14. What idiosyncratic touches did the filmmaker employ to reveal Bessie's character fully?

IV. Audience Response.

15. How did the filmmaker involve the audience directly in the action of this film?

16. What do you think the filmmaker gained by including scenes filmed in Prof. Ruff's classroom?

17. What insights into slave life did you gain from viewing the film?

18. Can you recall the last scene of the film? How did this ending affect you? Why was it an appropriate way to conclude the film?

PORTRAITS OF AGING

RECOMMENDED AUDIENCES AND SUBJECT AREAS

RECOMMENDED AUDIENCES:

NAME OF FILM:	pre-school	elementary	junior high	senior high	college	adults	older adults
The Art of Age			x	x	x	x	x
At 99: Louise T. Murch			x	x	x	x	x
Don't Mess With Bill				x	x	x	x
Last Stand Farmer				x	x	x	x
Lila				x	x	x	x
Love it Like a Fool				x	x	x	
Luther Metke at 94			x	x	x	x	x
Murita Cycles				x	x	x	
Nell and Fred				x	x	x	
Ruth Stout's Garden			x	x	x	x	x
Spike: Mont. Horseman			x	x	x	x	x
Yonder Come Day			x	x	x	x	

RECOMMENDED SUBJECT AREAS PORTRAITS OF AGING

SUBJECT AREAS	The Art of Age	At 99: Louise Murch	Don't Mess With Bill	Last Stand Farmer	Lila	Love it Like a Fool	Luther Metke at 94	Murita Cycles	Nell and Fred	Ruth Stout's Garden	Spike: Mont. Horseman	Yonder Come Day
ageism: dispel myths	x	x	x			x	x			x	x	
arts/crafts/music	x			x		x	x					x
counseling/psychology	x	x		x	x		x	x	x			
environment. concerns				x			x			x	x	
ethical issues				x	x		x		x		x	
film study/film art	x		x	x			x	x				
folklore/culture				x							x	x
history/soc. studies				x		x					x	x
intergenerational	x	x				x	x	x	x			x
long-term health care	x								x			
men's roles	x		x	x			x	x			x	
mental health prog.	x	x		x	x		x		x	x	x	
minorities & aging	x											x
nutrition concerns		x							x	x		
oral history			x	x		x	x			x	x	x
physical disability	x								x			
retirement concerns	x	x	x	x	x		x		x			
religious education	x	x		x	x		x		x		x	x
rural aging				x			x			x	x	x
values education	x	x		x	x		x		x	x	x	x
women's roles	x	x			x	x				x		x

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED FILMS

Angus

National Film Board of Canada, 1970, 12 min.

Farley Mowat, a well-known Canadian writer, creates an affectionate tribute to his father, Angus, a man whose great dream is to travel the wild oceans. In this lyrical film, aided by colorful photography and the sensitive use of music, we observe Angus pursue his dream by repairing an old boat in a remote area of the country. He enters his workshop on a winter day, and as he repairs his boat, we hear him singing shanty songs, accompanied by the banjo.

Although the film suggests Angus is a man who values his independence and who hasn't lost his capacity to dream, we hear no reminiscences from Angus, learn little about his background or his past, and never are sure how seriously we are to take his planned sea voyage. The film evokes the character, but it does not reveal him in any depth. Still, its imagery and music make it appropriate for use in programs on folklore, the romance of the sea, and Canadian history. Its use as a film portrait would be appropriate for high school and adult audiences.

Antonia: Portrait of the Woman

Phoenix Films, 1974, 58 min.

This film provides an intimate portrait of a remarkable woman, Antonia Brico, who was the first woman to conduct a symphony orchestra, who formed the first women's symphony orchestra, and who is now the conductor of Denver's Brico Symphony. Throughout the film she reveals the depth and the brilliance of her character. We see her rehearsing the orchestra, encouraging a young pianist, recounting stories of famous musicians she knew, and recalling intimate moments in her life--particularly the time she visited Albert Schweitzer. She shares many of her recollections with the well-known vocalist, Judy Collins, whose low-key presence in several scenes does not detract from the portrait of Ms. Brico.

She attacks her work with total commitment, and she admits that when she has completed an evening's work conducting the orchestra, she is emotionally drained. "Either you ride very high or you drop very low." In one scene she admits her frustration at not being able to conduct more than five times each year: "I don't let everybody know my heartbreak." But the film ends on an upbeat note, with Ms. Brico pounding out ragtime tunes on the piano, revealing again another side of her character.

On the whole she reveals herself to be an energetic, optimistic person, well worth knowing by audiences, particularly those interested in learning about the compelling nature of artistic creativity, the struggle for women to be recognized for their achievements, and the relationship of the conductor to her orchestra, and the determination of older people to contribute to the lives of others.

Arthur and Lillie

Pyramid Films, 1976, 30 min.

This film, about 89-year-old Arthur Mayer and his wife, Lillie, is actually two films: one about the Hollywood film industry, from its beginnings through World War II, and the other about one couple's adaptation to a new career late in life. Arthur recalls his years with Paramount Pictures as a publicity man in the 1920's and then as owner of the Rialto Theatre in New York City. At 78, he became a professor of cinema, teaching courses at three American universities each year.

We see him lecturing to his students at Dartmouth, entertaining some of his students at the couple's New York apartment, and in a delightful scene we see Arthur and Lillie packing for their trip to California, where he will lecture at Stanford. The rapport they exhibit in this scene suggests the dynamics of an interesting relationship. In the scene at their New York apartment, one of the students comments on Arthur and Lillie's refusal to become caught up in the past when he notes that their consciousnesses are in the present. Lillie sums up, "We've never held the other person back."

This film could be used most effectively to supplement the study of cinema history--particularly the early Hollywood Era--for college and adult audiences. Its portrayal of an older couple's relationship is less significant because the nuances of their characters are not revealed in this documentary.

Birch Canoe Builder

Aims Media, 1971, 23 min.

Bill Hafeman, almost seventy years old when the film was made, moved to the north woods years ago to free himself from the entanglements of the modern world, where people "go to work with a whistle and come home with a whistle." Over the years he has lived off of the land, hunting and trapping game, and finding peace of mind in his surroundings.

He also became interested in the Indian craft of building birch bark canoes. In his words, "Somebody ought to keep these things going. They belong in the woods country." The film shows all of the steps in the process of building the birch bark canoe, and evidence of Hafeman's craftsmanship is clearly portrayed. He even sews pieces of the bark by hand, using spruce roots he gathers in the woods to bind the sections. Interspersed with scenes showing the stages of construction are old photographs, providing images of what life was like in the woods in the 1930's. Hafeman also reminisces about his early days, and some of his stories are excellent examples of filmed oral history. He reveals himself to be a person concerned with the recovery of the timber and the return of wildlife to that area.

This film is recommended for high school and college classes studying American history or ecological and environmental issues, viewers interested in examining significant contributions of native craftspeople, and older audiences, who will be able to relate to the values expressed in the film.

David and Bert
National Film Board of Canada, 1977, 27 min.

The narrator introduces us to "Bert Clayton, prospector, and David Frank, singer, carver, and grandfather extraordinary." Although they are men from different cultures and with different life interests, the two men from Vancouver Island, British Columbia are portrayed as long-time friends. But the film does not reveal a great deal about their friendship; instead, we follow David, then Bert, as they go about their lives separately, then meet them at the end of the film for another rendezvous. Although the narrator "tells" us about their character and values, the film does not provide sufficient visual information or narration by the two men to complement those assertions.

Scenes devoted to Bert show him in remote areas, carrying out his work as a prospector, traveling by canoe on mountain lakes, and living in a cabin in the north woods. "I love the wilderness," he says. David Frank is shown explaining the significance of an Indian artifact and then passing on some of his wisdom and traditions to Indian children.

The film captures the rich scenery of the Northwest coast, and the narration often tries to be poetic in assessing the way of life the two men have experenced, referring to the the area as an "untouched paradise," and to the David and Bert as men who "have made old age not a disaster, but a gentle victory." Despite this "colorful" narration, the film would be appropriate for use in programs focused on ethnic studies, local color, and cross-cultural studies. Audiences of high school students to adults, particularly older adults, would be interested in this subject.

Dudley Carter
Abby Sher Productions, 1982, 58 min.

Born in 1891, Dudley Carter spent his early years working timber and surveying forests. The film documents his development of a wide range of artistic talents over the years, and it highlights his latest project, carving three massive tree trunks that will be installed in a new shopping center near Portland, Oregon. Scenes showing the stages of construction of this impressive sculpture are interspersed with scenes recalling his achievements as a younger man, including projects for the Federal Government during the Depression and the design and building of several low-cost houses, demonstrating an innovative use of wood products. One of his most beautiful artistic achievements was a 950-square-foot mural for the 1940 World's Fair in the style of Diego Rivera.

Although Dudley's story is presented competently by the filmmaker, one unfortunate drawback must be noted: all of Dudley Carter's words are spoken by a narrator, instead of by Dudley himself. As a result, the audience loses some of the essence of the man's character and statement of values because his words are communicated second-hand. Still, the use of a narrator to speak the character's words does not detract from the intrinsic value of the film portrait. Here we are shown a talented older person who continues to create his art late into life. The film might be useful in programs relating to regional studies, timber management, creativity and old age, and the use of folklore or native subjects for artistic purposes. Appropriate audiences would be young people of high school age, college students, and adults.

Forever Young

Learning Corporation of America, 1981, 58 min.

This film highlights the experiences of twenty-six older people who lead, for the most part, active and healthy lives, and who face new challenges with remarkable determination and vigor. Such active elders seem to exemplify—as in the oft-quoted lines from Browning—old age's promise as the culmination of all that is positive in life: "Grow old with me, / The best is yet to be; / The last of life, / From which the first was made." Of course, all twenty-six people do not receive equal treatment in the more than seventy separate scenes that comprise the film. That is understandable. The experiences of about a dozen people are emphasized, including a parachutist, a pilot who maintains his own vintage planes, a hot-air balloonist, a sculptor, a song writer, a wood carver, a writer-photographer, and a retired man whose days are filled with outings, even though he is confined to a motorized wheelchair.

One possible drawback to the film is that these people have in common a level of activity that is unusual for any group of people, whether young or old. Although this may to some extent be an objective of such a selection, such narrow attention to the artistic or physically active older person fails to take into account a more diverse range of backgrounds, abilities, and interests open to the old.

The other pattern that emerges from the film is that old age is a state of mind. The film suggests that if we keep healthy and active, if we keep moving, and if we fill our hours with tasks we enjoy, we will succeed in finding fulfilment. Unfortunately, the message is carried by people who are often inarticulate spokespersons for the cause of active aging. Their statements lack the subtlety we might expect from older people whose experiences have enriched their lives. A sampling of their comments: "If I didn't have enthusiasm, I don't think there would be any future for me"; "When work becomes your life, there is beauty in this work"; and "You've got to have something to do every day." It is difficult to argue with these opinions, but the message they communicate is obvious.

In spite of these criticisms, many audiences will enjoy and even relate to the optimistic message the film attempts to convey. After all, it is refreshing to see so many people who have decided to be "forever young" rather than to embrace too quickly the limitations imposed on them by advancing years. Moreover, the film is photographed beautifully, well-edited, and features "real people" able to engage life on their own terms. A wide range of audiences, from senior high school to older adults, will learn something from the film.

Halvor Landsverk: Woodcarver

University of Minnesota, 1973, 30 min.

A craftsperson and artist from Highland Prairie, Minnesota, Halvor Landsverk has become well known for the Norwegian log chairs, or kubbestols, he crafts by hand from sections of basswood logs. The primary aim of the film is to show the process of completing the kubbestol, beginning with the choice of trees to use for logs. After cutting out a rough shape, Halvor uses hand-carving tools to define the details of his design.

The artist is revealed through this portrait as a humble, sensitive man who believes that "art flourishes best in a home where there is perfect happiness among the members." His reminiscences of his father suggest that close family ties have long been important to him. Viewers of the film will gain an understanding of the commitment of a modern craftsperson whose artistic and religious values are the basis for all of his work. The film is recommended for use in high school and college art classss, especially those that emphasize the continuity of the folk arts in a rural American setting. Religious groups and older audiences will relate well to the values expressed in the film.

Imogen Cunningham: Photographer

Time-Life Films, 1972, 20 min.

John Korty, who directed the award-winning The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, creates another vivid portrait of an indomitable spirit, Imogen Cunningham. Korty provides viewers with clear biographical material on the artist's professional development. At eighty-nine she still works in her darkroom, often making prints from old negatives. In one scene we see her at work, photographing a nude model. If she is asked when she will retire, she answers, "When I can't focus anymore."

But the director also gives us an intimate, often humorous portrait of an active, spirited woman who enjoys life. An accurate description of her sometimes eccentric character is reflected in her own words on Gertrude Stein: "A woman with so much style she could ignore fashion." This film is a positive, uplifting study of one person's art and aging, and it is recommended for those interested in the history of photography as an art form and the contribution of American women to photographic art. Appropriate audiences would range from high school students to adults.

Me and Stella: A Film About Elizabeth Cotten

Phoenix Films, 1977, 24 min.

"Me and Stella. It was always me and Stella." Elizabeth Cotten, the 83-year-old subject of this film portrait, recalls her attachment to her first guitar, which she named "Stella." As a young black woman, Elizabeth held jobs cooking and cleaning for white women. She stopped playing her guitar after she got married and started raising children. At the age of fifty she came to Washington and began to work for Ruth and Charles Seeger, who recognized her musical talent as a musician and composer of folk songs. She began to perform then and is now well known as the composer of the famous song, "Freight Train" (which she wrote at the age of twelve).

The film is a straightforward account of her life and times, and although she often speaks openly about some of the hard times in her life, she does not follow through on those comments to reveal more about her character. At one point, for example, she recalls one member of her family calling her "moody." She says, "I didn't know I was moody. I just get tired of people and I keep to myself." She seems most comfortable with "Stella," and the film ends with her playing her guitar and singing another song. The film is appropriate for audiences interested in the history of folk music, ethnic studies, and black history.

Mr. Story
Phoenix Films, 1973, 27 min.

This film portrays the character of an ordinary man, Mr. Story, whose opinions about life and other people are often uninformed and biased, but always humorous and consistent with his character. You can always expect an opinion from Mr. Story, and the filmmaker cleverly introduces each point of view with a slide stating the subject. Some examples: "Doctors"--"I don't think they know what they're doing"; "The Kiss"--"Some of 'em go gum suckin', but I don't like that kind"; "Priests and Ministers"--"They get too familiar with the women, and they fall apart. They're human"; "Women's Liberation"--"When it comes to their character, they should lead the good life." There is little action in the film; Mr. Story sits at home, talks to his dog, changes a flat tire on his car. But the essence of his values are brought forth through the many opinions he expresses, and the filmmaker's sympathies are clear: we are not either to judge Mr. Story or laugh at him because of his opinions. We are to listen to him and to learn what he believes in.

The film would be most appropriately shown to adult audiences and used in conjunction with another film portrait, such as At 99: A Portrait of Louise Tandy Murch, Luther Metke at 94, or Spike: A Montana Horseman in order to contrast the statements of values in two films.

Portraits of Aging
Centron Educational Films, 1978, 29 min.

"We are all artists, and what is it we create--but our experiences." This conviction underlies the portraits of several older people in this film, including a philosopher writing a book, a married couple bird watching, a gardener, community volunteer, actors in community theatre. Each person's portrait emphasizes his or her positive attitude toward life.

The determination of one 67-year old woman is highlighted in scenes showing her dancing with an 84-year-old partner, even though she has had total knee replacements in both legs. Her advice: "Try hard--don't give up."

The film limits itself because of its many superficial portraits, however, and one aspect of the film seems contrived: an artist paints a literal portrait of many of the real people to underscore the "art" of their age. But this film is not as effective as the film The Art of Age, which limited the number of portraits to four and used effective editing to reveal the "art" of its subjects experiences. Portraits of Aging ends with a direct plea for more effective support services for older people. Although the film does not reveal any depth of character in its portraits, it offers positive examples of aging for older audiences and interested health-care professionals.

Sourwood Mountain Dulcimers
Appalshop Films, 1977, 28 min

This film portrait is one of several from Appalshop Films, which also produced Nature's Way, Chairmaker, Lee Banks: Mountain Farmer, and Oaksie, all portraits of Appalachian artists and craftspeople. But Sourwood Mountain Dulcimers stands out from the others because of the fascinating music we hear in the film and because of the sincerity and depth of the relationship between the excellent musicians featured in the film. Although I. D. Stamper is the subject of this film portrait, what audiences will remember from the film are the conversations between I. D. Stamper and a younger man, John McCutcheon, who clearly has a sensitive touch when it comes to Appalachian folk music, particularly the dulcimer. We are treated to several songs performed by this duo, and we hear both men perform music on several dulcimers.

This film would be appropriate for use in music classes at the junior high to college levels, and it would be suitable for general young and older adult audiences in various settings. Although the pace of the film sometimes is slow or uneven, the music alone is worth the price of admission.

THE GREAT CIRCLE OF LIFE:

A Resource Guide

to

Humanistic Films on Aging

CHAPTER THREE -- INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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CHAPTER THREE -- INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational relationships provide a diverse set of contexts for demonstrating the wisdom that is gleaned from experience, for passing on values to another generation, and for forming intimate bonds across the generations. Older characters in these films are not isolated from society; instead, they interact meaningfully, inviting audiences to view them as multi-dimensional individuals, capable of relating to others with a diversity of roles. Some display the accumulated wisdom that allows them to pass on values to the younger generation; some inspire the young with the mystery and symbolism of an extended life span; some put the younger generation in touch with the richness of a shared past; some recognize the creativity of the very young and help them realize their potential; some act as mentors for those who need their encouragement and support; some display a passion and vulnerability that may be lacking in a younger generation that retreats from emotional commitments; and some add a fullness and completeness to a generation that often feels alienated from their elders.

Films like Death of a Gandy Dancer and Thank You, Ma'm highlight the values that older people have distilled through their experiences. As they interact with younger characters in these films, they serve as living examples of the values they believe in, and the outcome of their involvement reflects the continuity of experience that is transmitted across the generations. The actions of the older characters speak articulately for those values; the young learn honesty, hard work, trust, compassion, and fairness as a result of their commitment to these relationships.

A similar lesson about values is given in The Hundred Penny Box. In this film a young boy is so attracted to the hundred-year-old woman his family takes care of that he spends every possible moment with her. To the young boy Aunt Dew possesses one of the secrets to life--her hundred-penny box. This simple wooden chest symbolizes the rich store of experiences that Aunt Dew has accumulated over the years and it represents her clear sense of identity and equanimity achieved despite the pain of several personal losses during her lifetime. The young boy values everything about the old woman, and he recognizes intuitively that she has a lesson to teach him about the meaning of life.

In Peege a family struggles to endure the required Christmas visit with their aging parent and grandparent, who resides in a nursing home. Although the son and his wife half-heartedly attempt to create a festive atmosphere, both clearly suffer from feelings of grief, fear, and even despair. Two of the grandsons appear detached from the emotional burden the parents are trying to suppress. Only the oldest grandson, Greg, faces the emotionally charged memories from the past and realizes the joy that is available to him through reminiscences of happier times with Peege. Alone with Peege at the end of the film, Greg recalls several episodes with his lively and irrepressible grandmother, and Peege is moved by his reminiscences of a shared past.

In Portrait of Grandpa Doc this same character, Greg, benefits again from the interaction with an older character. When his grandfather (his mother's father) recognizes a budding artistic talent in the young boy, he nurtures his creativity carefully and purposefully, giving Greg every opportunity to refine his talent. Greg acknowledges Grandpa Doc's role as mentor in a special way, making his memories of summers spent with his grandfather the subject of an art exhibit he is planning. As we watch Greg prepare his paintings, his relationship with Grandpa Doc unfolds before us, and when the exhibit is complete, Greg's ability to assimilate the meaning of the past leads to a reconciliation with his mother.

The grandfather in Home to Stay is portrayed as a former mentor of both his son, who now runs the family farm, and his young niece, who was orphaned years earlier when her parents died in an automobile crash. Now because of the physical problems associated with his advancing senility, he is viewed as an unwelcome burden by his son. But his young niece still insists on seeing him as her mentor, capable of dealing with any crisis, and when she acts to maintain his standing in the family, she gives him an opportunity to resolve a serious conflict between his son and himself and preserve his niece's future.

Sometimes older characters provide surprising lessons for members of the younger generation. In the film One More Winter an older woman is able to put a young man in touch with the role of passion and emotional commitment in human relationships. To the young man, relationships with other women are easy to begin and end and mean little in terms of long-term emotional commitment. But after the older woman shares the depth of her feelings for another older man, who is married, the young man begins to realize the intricacies that are possible in love relationships.

The children in Close Harmony, the only non-fictional film in this chapter, experience relationships with older characters that stimulate their creativity and offer them new insights on the values and experiences that affect the lives of older people. The childrens' teacher, Arlene Symons, initiates the dialogue between young and old to facilitate the process of creating an intergenerational chorus, but the upshot of her experiment is the fostering of many precious friendships between the young and the old.

In every film intergenerational relationships offer something of value to both the young and the old. When members of different generations realize they have something in common, they interact in meaningful contexts, sometimes learning about life in unexpected ways. The outcomes of those interactions may vary, but in almost every case characters gain insights into their attitudes and values and discover new truths about the meaning of interpersonal relationships.

INTRODUCTION

It is easy to fall in love with the children and the older adults in this film because they accomplish what many people have sought--a meaningful intergenerational relationship. Brought together by a dynamic music teacher, Arlene Symons, and motivated by their ability, interest, and enthusiasm for music as common bonds, these fourth and fifth graders and their older counterparts gain a significant understanding of what all relationships entail: time spent nurturing their bonds, a commitment to a common undertaking, an appreciation of the risks inherent in new relationships, an understanding of the value of friendships that result when friendships are developed, and an acceptance of the painful losses that can occur when you connect your experiences and feelings to another person's life.

The structure of the film complements the story being told. Although the film is non-fiction, it employs many conventions of fictional stories. In other words, it incorporates a plot, suspense, and a climax. When viewers understand the nature of Arlene Symons' experiment, they are able to ask a fundamental question: will her intergenerational chorus succeed? We follow the progress of her direction of both groups through the film. As the rehearsals continue, we note some of the ingredients of that eventual success: the quality of the music, Arlene Symons' direction and leadership, the strenuous rehearsals, the commitment of the members of the choirs, the friendships that begin to develop between young and old, the respect that is fostered by their interaction, and finally their climactic performance at the end of the film. Along the way, moments of suspense are resolved, and the action leads to small and large accomplishments and satisfying relationships. The song sung at the first rehearsal of both choirs, "The Rainbow Connection," is the appropriate song to symbolize the unity of these two groups: they are connected, even bonded, in a way that would not have been possible except for the direction of Arlene Symons and the universality of the music both groups generated.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Tell your audience they are about to see a film that portrays the creation of an intergenerational chorus. Ask members of your audience to speculate on what is meant by the term "intergenerational chorus." How old would they expect the members of that choir to be? Ask members of the audience if they know of such a chorus or have seen such a group.

2) Ask members of your audience to consider what obstacles must be overcome to direct such a group and to make their performances effective. What would be required in order to make such an endeavor a success? Some possible responses: an excellent music teacher/director; a good choice of music; members of the choirs respecting each other, working together, even becoming friends.

3) Explain that the film is able to emphasize the creation of meaningful relationships between the young and the old through editing: your audience should watch for scenes which include action taking place in separate locations in order to compare the reactions of the young people and the older adults. When the two choirs rehearse together for the first time, we hear music from that rehearsal while we see a lunch-time scene that took place earlier. This combination of music and image helps bring the two groups together in the context of fostering meaningful relationships.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Fourth and fifth grade children, all members of a choir, rehearse a song. Their music teacher, Arlene Symons, exhorts them with great enthusiasm. Then we see a scene at a different location, a senior citizens center, where Ms. Symons is rehearsing a choir of older adults. She is equally zealous with this group, shouting her commands: "Give me the whole thing! I need that, so I won't be frustrated at the end!"

2. Arlene Symons recalls how the idea of an "intergenerational chorus" came to her. She directed several adult choirs, but at performances she never saw children or young adults. "It struck me then how isolated our senior citizens are despite all their wonderful programs."

   She explains that the two choirs rehearse in separate locations for three months. Then they combine their efforts in the intergenerational choir. When the children began to ask questions about the older adults in the other choir, one of their teachers suggested they write letters to the older adults.

   We see the children writing letters to the older adults. Several children share their experiences with older people and their attitudes toward the old. One boy said that his mother told him some older people "don't like children at all, so at first I didn't want to write to a pen pal." Another child says, "If we give them respect, they should give us back respect."

3. Arlene Symons hands out letters from the students to the older adults at their rehearsal site. The men and women in the choir are eager to read the letters from their "pen pals." Ms. Symons notes, "you do a lot of writing and you get them back." We also see a teacher at school distributing letters from the older adults to the children. We see scenes of both groups reacting to letters they have received. Several of the children share their definition of what "old" is. One young person says, "You could be a very young person when you're eighty, and old when you're forty." Others associate old age with physically slowing down, with sickness, with being in a wheelchair, with the end of life.

4. The older adult choir rehearsing. As the singing continues, we see images of some of the choir members shopping and completing errands. One of the women from the choir says, "To us, age doesn't mean anything. As long as you want to go out, as long as you see things beautiful, you're young. You could. You could be young at eighty, or old at twenty-five." We see the adult chorus rehearsing another song, then hear one of the men from the chorus saying, "Age is just as old as you want it to be." One of the women says, "I enjoy being a part of the chorus. I want to do the best I can. I'm very happy doing it. I think the children have made it so."

5. One of the children from the other choir explains that he has changed his opinion of older people after writing to his pen pal. Another child shares her feelings: "I used to think when they were young they didn't have as much as I do." Now she realizes, "Maybe I'll still have fun when I am old." Two other children admit that their pen pals have died recently. They express their sadness at this loss. One girl, excited about meeting her pen pal, says, "I feel as though I love her already."

6. The big day arrives, the first joint rehearsal of the two choirs, and the first time the children will meet the older adults. When the children enter, pen pals "find" each other, and hugs and kisses abound.

   As we hear songs from the rehearsal in the background, we see several scenes that evidently occurred before the rehearsal, showing the young and old seated close to each other around small tables, eating lunch and sharing experiences and feelings. The editing here emphasizes the genuine warmth of the intergenerational relationships.

7. Arlene Symons shares the difficulties she faced in trying to coordinate the two groups, and she admits, "No matter how much I rehearse and how long I work on this production, I'm terrified."

   The day of the concert. Some of the older adults share their excitement. One woman says, "I feel very excited, very exhilarated. I feel like I'm a star!" Then we see the audience waiting in the auditorium. The members of the two choirs come down the center aisle, one older adult at a time, walking arm-in-arm with one or two children, all dressed in formal attire. On stage the two choirs begin to sing, their voices harmonizing beautifully: "The sweetest sound I'll ever hear is still inside my head. . ." The film ends as the opening number continues.

1981, Learning Corporation of America,
28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What feelings did this film evoke regarding relationships between the young and the old?

2. What are some of the "secrets" to the success of Arlene Symons' endeavor to create an intergenerational chorus?

II. An Intergenerational Chorus.

3. Which of the comments made by the children struck you as most significant? Were you surprised by any of their attitudes toward older people?

4. Why did Arlene Symons want to establish an intergenerational choir?

5. What do you think the children learned from having these experiences with the older adults? What do ou think the older adults learned?

III. Bridging the Generation Gap.

6. What are some of the ways the generation gap was bridged in this film?

7. Were you surprised by any of the comments the children made when they referred to what it meant to be "old"?

8. Why was the activity of writing letters such a good idea? What was accomplished by these "pen pals"?

9. What was your impression of Arlene Symons, the music director of the choirs? What do you think she contributed to this intergenerational "experience"?

IV. General Questions.

10. What are some of the ways this film would be effective in addressing negative stereotypes toward aging?

11. Can you recall the last scene in the film? Why was that scene an appropriate way to end the film?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Before you viewed the film, you may have considered some of the obstacles that must be overcome in order to create an intergenerational chorus. Based on your discussion then, consider the following "ingredients" that were part of Arlene Symons' successful experiment. You may want to add additional ingredients to that list. Consider all of them in the context of the following questions:

1) How did each ingredient contribute to the success of this intergenerational chorus?

2) What values can you associate with each of these ingredients?

3) What does each ingredient (or value) teach us about the basis of intergenerational relationships?

Ingredients

--ARLENE SYMONS

--CHOICE OF MUSIC

--WRITING LETTERS

--PROMOTING FRIENDSHIPS BETWEEN YOUNG AND OLD

INTRODUCTION

The special relationship in this film between Ben Matthews, a former railroader, and his grandson Josh is based on their shared interests in the tradition of railroading and the strong bond of affection between a grandfather and his grandson. Ben is portrayed as the epitome of grandfatherly wisdom: early in the film we see Ben passing on traditions and values that matter to the young boy. We see him teaching the boy the proper way to tap maple trees, and we see him underscore the patience and good care required of the person who takes freely from nature's bounty.

But this film attempts to convey meaning on several levels. This story of a significant intergenerational relationship is complicated by the impending death of Ben from cancer, and this turn of events is complicated further by his daughter and son-in-law's refusal to tell him directly and honestly that he has terminal cancer. This twist in the plot leads to a growing sense of tension and anxiety within the family unit, and soon the strain of keeping the secret disrupts all of the relationships in the family. Ben's daughter, Margaret, suffers various stages of grief with no outlet; her husband Ben also suffers in silence. But the repeated deceptions catch up with the family when Ben passes out while on a special trip with Josh.

But Margaret continues to deny the reality of Ben's condition. At a climactic Thanksgiving Day dinner, Ben addresses the situation himself, declaring to his family that he knows he is dying. Now the family is forced to face the truth. Ben leads the way, stating for all to hear the values he has lived his life by. He asks of the others only their support in this time of need. Josh is the first to rally to him, but after Ben's condition worsens, and he remains bedridden, Josh, too, is faced with a new conflict: can he accept the man who is dying in the upstairs bedroom as his grandfather? Josh's struggle to accept death is aided by his parents' new perspective. They play supportive roles for the young boy, and when Ben Matthews dies, the entire family is at his bedside, able to respond with love to this painful loss.

Facing the truth of Ben's dying has been a turning point for this family. We see them at the end renewed and able to relate honestly to each other. Evidence of Josh's growth is shown at the end of the film, when we see the boy tapping the last of the maple trees by himself. His act is a final testament to the values Ben Matthews tried to pass on to his grandson.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) You may want to tell your audience that the film is aimed primarily at a younger audience; viewers are asked to identify with the point of view of the ten-year-old character, Josh. Given this identification, the film attempts to prepare younger viewers for the reality of death in their lives, and it addresses the question of how to deal with the grief experienced at the death of a family member.

2) As in the case of the film Peege this film can provoke an intense emotional response on the part of the audience. Consider asking members of the audience if they have experienced the death of a family member, perhaps a grandparent, when they were in their pre-teens. How did the death of that family member affect them at that time? What factors caused their grief to linger over time? What factors enabled them to accept this loss? Ask your audience to concentrate on the strong bond of the relationship between Ben Matthews and his grandson, Josh, as they begin to view the film. By emphasizing this relationship, the filmmaker intends to demonstrate the continuity of experience that remains even after two people who love each other are separated by death.

3) Note that the filmmaker intends to depict the complexities that abound when conflicting motivations exist in the various characters. Many difficult questions are raised by this story: who has the right not to tell a person (s)he has a terminal illness? What criteria would be employed in making that determination? Does the dying person have a right to control the terms of his/her terminal illness; in other words, does that person have the right to deny extraordinary means that can keep him/her alive? How can family members support such a decision as fairly and honestly as possible?

4) Prepare viewers for the sophisticated film techniques employed by the filmmaker. For example, composition is employed in several scenes to make clear the ideas that are being communicated:

Some effective examples of composition in the film:

- The extreme long shot of the house, used at the beginning of the film and just before Ben's death. In each case, the shot sets a mood appropriate for the scene: in the first instance Ben and Josh are shown in the next shot warming themselves by the fireplace, comfortable within a hostile environment. In the second instance Josh is awakened by his father and asked to face the harsh reality of his grandfather's dying; here warmth and stability come from his supportive parents.

- The extreme long shot in scene 2, showing Ben and Josh walking across the snow-covered field, suggests the role of nature in defining the relationship of a human being to his environment. Ben is attuned to nature, and this link with something outside of himself helps him when he is faced with dying.

- In scene 5, showing Ben and Jim playing checkers, we see Margaret seated in the background, but between the two men. She tries to control the events defining Ben's life at this point; thus, she is positioned in the center of the frame, appropriate for her need to interfere with Ben's decision-making.

- In scene 7 we see Ben seated in a darkened room, and Margaret is standing behind Ben, as if she is literally moving "behind his back" by continuing to lie to him about his physical condition. Compare this composition with Margaret's position in scene 10, when she stands behind Josh in order to help him face his grandfather's impending death.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. A two-story wood-frame house in the country at evening. Inside a young boy, Josh, and his grandfather, Ben Matthews, sit by the fire. Ben is a former railroader, and he reminisces about his adventures with an old friend, Earl Johnson, who is the engineer of a local freight train. Ben tells Josh that if he isn't "sassy" he'll take him along for a ride in the train, and Ben and Earl may even show the boy some gandy dancing.

2. Ben and Josh walk across a snow-covered field, heading toward a small stand of maples. Josh asks why railroad men were called "gandy dancers." Ben tells him that Gandy was the name of the company that made all the track. When the men laid the rails, they "danced" in order to make their work less irksome. As they walk along, we focus on Ben, who stops for a moment, and with a wistful look in his eyes, says "Gandy dancing's a thing of the past. Machines lay the track nowadays."

3. The scene changes. Ben is sitting on the edge of an x-ray table at a hospital. When the technician leaves, he begins to button his shirt. His face shows a questioning, troubled expression.

   In the doctor's office, where the doctor is talking to Ben's daughter, Margaret, and his son-in-law, Jim. He gives them bad news: Ben has cancer. Margaret looks with dismay at her husband. He asks, "How bad is it?" The doctor says "It's hopeless, I'm afraid," and explains that the tumor has spread from under the arm into Ben's chest. But when the doctor asks, "Do you want me to tell him?", Margaret declares, "He's not to know, Jim. How do you say to a man like Ben Matthews--you're dying." Although Jim questions the wisdom of not telling Ben, Margaret won't change her mind.

   The scene changes to the car on the way home. We see Ben alone in the back seat, looking out the window, then note Margaret turn around from the front seat to look at him. But she says nothing.

4. In the woods we see Ben beginning to tap a maple tree. Josh hammers in a tap on another tree, using rapid and sharp strokes. In the background, Ben looks up to see Josh's work, but when he notices that Josh has pounded the tap in too far, he shows him how to pound a tap in properly.

   Later we see Ben seated at the kitchen table in the house, watching Josh finish a model of a railroad boxcar. When Josh has trouble attaching the wheels, Ben shows him an easy shortcut, making assembly easier. Josh responds, "Grandpa, you know everything." After Margaret brings everyone a hot drink, Josh tells his father that when the car is assembled, they will paint it yellow just like the car he and Grandpa will ride in on their trip. Here Margaret interjects, "I think maybe we should talk about that trip." She sits down, and now she and Jim begin to chip away at Ben's plans. Jim says, "I don't know. It sounds pretty ambitious to me." Margaret adds, "Maybe you're not up to it." But Ben mutters, "Oh, I'm all right." Margaret says sharply, "Dad!" The argument ends, unresolved for now.

5. Ben and Jim using a crosscut saw to cut firewood. When Ben shows obvious signs of fatigue, Jim offers, "Why don't you take a break, Ben? You're looking tired." But Ben doesn't quit. As Josh runs up to them, Jim says, "Please, Ben. You're getting too old for this thing." Josh offers his help, but Ben won't give in.

In the house that night. While Jim and Ben play checkers in the foreground, we see Margaret between them, sewing in the background. She says, "I still think that train trip's a bad idea." Ben ignores her comment. Margaret pursues the subject. "Besides, I don't want Josh messing around in those freight trains. I don't think they're safe." Ben counters, "They're perfectly safe." Margaret adds, "You're in pain, Dad. That's the truth." Ben snaps, "It's just bursitis." With a look of uncertainty in his eyes, he adds, "Well, isn't it?" Margaret sidesteps this question and continues to criticize the trip. Ben explodes, "Leave me alone! I'm going!"

6. We see Josh and Ben in the boxcar, the freight train traveling fast down the track, its movement accompanied by fast-paced banjo music. Inside, the two sit next to an open door, singing loudly and having a rollicking good time.

Later, Josh gives Ben the completed model of his hand-made wooden boxcar. On the side he has painted, instead of the logo of a railroad, the words, "BEN & JOSH." Ben shows by his expression how much this gift means to him.

After a quiet scene in the caboose with Earl Johnson, we see the two old men climbing down from the caboose to show Josh some "gandy dancing." They reenact the movements of laying track, yowling in delight, "Move it out and sing your song!" Josh chimes in, excited by this new experience. But in a matter of minutes the excitement changes to terror; Ben suddenly falls to the ground, whispering to Earl, "Take me home."

7. Ben, seated in a darkened room at home, looking weary and run-down. Margaret comes in to rub some alcohol on his back and side. She mentions his "bursitis," but he cries, "I've never felt like this before!" She answers, "It'll go away." As the camera moves in for a closeup of Ben, we hear him say, "It's like my body has turned against me."

Out in the woods again, Josh is busily pounding in taps. When Josh points out that Ben has pounded in one of his own taps too far, Ben snaps at him and sends him to the house. We see Margaret watching this scene from a window in the house. She sees Ben slump down against a tree, fighting to regain the strength that has ebbed from his body.

When Josh comes in and sees his mother crying openly, she denies anything is wrong at first, but then opens her arms to her son.

8. Thanksgiving Day, the table set, the turkey ready to be carved. When Margaret asks Jim to carve the turkey, Ben enters the room and says, "I'm the carver here." But when he begins to carve, he has to stop because his arm is too weak. Josh asks, "What's the matter, Grandpa?" Jim and Margaret try to silence Josh's questioning, but Ben stops them, saying, "Whatever it is, I'm in a lot of trouble." Then he adds, "I'm just wondering what's happening to this family." Margaret says, "Nothing's happening."

But Ben admits finally, "I'm dying. That's what's happening."
We see the stunned reactions of Josh and Margaret, and then Jim asks Josh to leave the room. Ben, however, wants everyone, including Josh, to hear him out. "There's nothing so shameful about dying that a boy can't hear." He

announces, "Now listen to me. All of you." As he continues, we see reactions of Margaret, Josh, and Jim to his message. "I'm sixty-eight years old, I've done good honest work all of my life, I've paid my debts. I've raised a family, and I've buried my wife." He continues, "So if it's time for me to die, I suppose I'm ready. Only sometimes I get a little scared." Josh rushes toward him and the two embrace. Margaret cries and puts her hand over her face. Ben looks at the two adults and says sternly, "Only damn it, it doesn't help when you all lie to me!" Margaret suddenly stops crying.

9. On a late winter day, we see Jim out in the stand of maples, emptying pails of sap. But Josh sits next to the fire, glum, lost in his own thoughts, unwilling to help his father.

   Inside the house, Margaret is with Ben in his bedroom. He expresses his determination to die at home, not in the hospital. "I'm going to die. Let me do it here--with the people I love." Then he asks, "Where's Josh?"

   We see Josh downstairs, sitting alone by the fire. He still seems depressed. His father encourages him to go upstairs, because Josh hasn't visited his grandfather very much. "It smells funny. I don't like it in there." When he adds, "He doesn't look like Grandpa," his father says, "Well, he _is_ Grandpa." But Josh cries, "Why does he have to die?" and runs out of the room.

10. Late at night, Jim wakes up Josh and takes him upstairs to Ben's room. In the darkened room, Margaret greets her son with a warm embrace and leads him to Ben's bed, where he lies nearly unconscious. We see the man reach out for the boy's hand. But he cannot speak. Josh asks, "Grandpa?" But Ben is dead. We see the reactions of Jim and Margaret, then of Josh, his mother's hands on his shoulders, supporting him through this experience.

    The camera moves through the bare trees of a cemetery, showing the family and friends gathered around the grave site, set amid a wintry landscape. The camera moves in as we hear the minister's words: "He was not afraid to live, and he was not afraid to die." The minister adds, "But when a life is well-spent, there is no such thing as death. To those whose lives he touched, Ben Matthews lives on."

11. We see Josh at the stand of maples, drilling holes in the trunk of a tree, then pounding in the tap. He turns to look toward the house, and we see a shot of the window of Ben's room. Josh says proudly, "I tapped the trees, Grandpa. I did it." Then we see an extreme closeup of the tap, drops of sap coming down. Josh reaches down with the tip of his finger and brings a drop of sap up to his mouth for a taste. At that moment the filmmaker stops the action, and holds on the image of Josh tasting the sweet sap.

--1977, Learning Corporation of America,
26 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What were some of the feelings you were left with after viewing this film? Did the relationships portrayed in the film put you in touch with your feelings toward anyone you know or have known?

2. What one scene stands out in your memory after viewing this film? What do you think was communicated in that scene?

3. Which character in the film do you think learned the most about his/her life and values and his/her relationships with others?

II. Ben and Josh.

4. How would you characterize Ben and Josh's relationship? Can you recall some examples of their interaction that typify their relationship?

5. What are some of the values Ben is trying to pass on to Josh?

6. Why is "gandy dancing" such an important memory to Ben?

7. Why is the ride in the railroad boxcar so important to Ben? What did the two characters gain by sharing that experience?

8. What did you think was significant about Josh's decision to give Ben his model of the boxcar, with "BEN & JOSH" labeled on the side? What do you think that gift meant to Ben?

III. Ben's Cancer.

9. Did you feel that the doctor's response to Margaret and Jim's decision not to tell Ben about the cancer was appropriate? What else could the doctor have done in this situation?

10. Why doesn't Margaret want Ben to know that he has terminal cancer?

11. What examples of non-verbal communication did you notice in the scenes in the doctor's office and in the car afterwards?

12. When you realized Margaret and Jim were not going to tell Ben about the cancer, what did you think would be the consequences of their decision on the relationships within the family?

13. When Margaret and Jim continue to keep Ben's illness a secret, what are some of the effects on the relationships within the family? Can you recall specific scenes that illustrate those effects?

IV. The Thanksgiving Dinner.

14. What did you notice about the way this scene opened, especially when Margaret asked Jim to carve the turkey?

15. Why does Jim ask Josh to leave the room when Ben admits that he is dying? Why does Ben want the boy to stay?

16. Who is suffering the most in this scene?

17. What values did Ben articulate in this scene, and what impact do you think his statement had on the members of the family?

18. What do you think Margaret learns about herself in this scene?

19. Which character did you identify with most as you viewed this scene?

V. Ben's Final Days.

20. Why doesn't Josh help his father with the maple-sugaring the next spring? When Ben asks to see Josh, why doesn't the boy want to visit him?

21. How were Jim and Margaret supportive of Ben in his last few months of life? How did you react to the way they interacted with Josh the night Ben died?

22. Did you think the minister's eulogy was an accurate characterization of Ben's life? If the eulogy had been written by either Margaret or Josh, what do you think she/he would have said about Ben?

23. What was added to the meaning of the film by including the last scene, showing Josh tapping the maple trees?

24. What do you think the filmmaker wanted to communicate in the last image we saw in the film, showing Josh tasting the sap from the tree?

VI. General Questions.

25. How do the attitudes and actions of Josh's mother affect our response to her? Does the film fairly portray her response to the situation?

26. How much time passed in this film? How does the family's involvement with the maple-sugaring season help us follow the movement of time in the film?

27. What do you think the family as a whole gained by experiencing three generations living together?

28. If there are children in the audience, what would you want to make clear to them after they have viewed the film?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET A

As you view the film, take note of the values that are being portrayed in the relationships among characters, especially between Ben Matthews and his grandson, Josh. In each case below, discuss the values being expressed and consider each of the following questions:

a) What values are being expressed in the scene(s) related to this subject?

b) What dialogue in the scene(s) related to this subject contribute to our understanding of the values being expressed?

c) What images can you recall in the scene(s) related to this subject that contribute to our understanding of the values being expressed?

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1) Ben shows Josh how to tap maple trees:

2) Ben's decision to take Josh with him on a train ride with Earl Johnson:

3) Margaret's decision not to tell Ben he has terminal cancer:

4) Josh gives Ben the completed model of the railroad boxcar, with BEN & JOSH painted on the side:

5) Ben's declaration at the Thanksgiving dinner that he knows he's dying:

6) Josh's father wakes him in the middle of the night to take him upstairs and see Ben, and Josh's mother stands behind him as Ben tries to speak:

7) Josh taps the maple trees by himself at the end of the film:

SAMPLE WORKSHEET B

The climactic scene in the film is the Thanksgiving Dinner, where Ben acknowledges his fear of dying in front of the family. One way of understanding the ideas being expressed in this scene is to consider the following examples of editing in this scene. In each case below list some of the ideas you believe the filmmaker intends by the use of such shot selections:

1) When the scene opens, we do not see Ben in the frame. Margaret tells Jim, "You carve the turkey." As soon as Jim stands up, however, Ben enters the room and says, "I'm the carver here."

2) When Ben speaks the truth about his illness, knowing that he will die, the filmmaker shows a quick series of reaction shots, showing the separate members of the family.

3) As Ben speaks plainly and openly about his life, the filmmaker focuses on the other members of the family--not on Ben--in separate shots.
--Ben says, "I'm sixty-eight years old" (We see Margaret)
--Ben says, "I've done good honest work all my life" (We see Josh)
--Ben says, "I've paid my debts" (We see Jim)
--Ben says, "I've raised a family, and I've buried a wife" (We see Margaret)

4) Ben admits, "So if it's time for me to die, I suppose I'm ready. Only sometimes I get a little scared." We see Josh leave his chair at the table, rush to Ben's side, and embrace him.

5) Ben turns to the adults and says, "Only damn it, it doesn't help when you all lie to me!" We see a reaction shot of Margaret, crying. Suddenly she gets control of herself.

INTRODUCTION

Aimed primarily at a younger audience, Home to Stay tells the story of a adolescent girl's special relationship with her grandfather. Orphaned when her parents were killed in an automobile accident, Sarah was taken in by her grandfather, who now is experiencing the symptoms of advancing senility. His youngest son, Frank, wants to take over the operation of the family farm, but Grandpa seems reluctant to hand over control to him. Because of Grandpa's worsening physical condition, Frank is determined to wrest control of the farm from his father--even if he has to have the old man declared mentally incompetent.

But when he introduces this subject, Sarah bristles. She distrusts Frank's motives and does not believe his opinion of Grandpa's health. When she looks at Grandpa, she still sees the strong and self-assured man who was willing to take care of her after her parents died. She feels confident that a medical opinion offered by Grandpa's son-in-law, a physician in Chicago, will contradict Frank's judgment of his father's competence. The action in the film begins to develop when Sarah acts on her belief. With the help of a fourteen-year-old friend, she tries to drive Grandpa across the state to Chicago. Their quixotic adventures are humorous and insightful, and although the young people fail to achieve their goal, their journey becomes the catalyst that leads to a resolution of Grandpa and Frank's conflict.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask your audience to watch for scenes in which the significance of some of the actions are missed by the characters who are children. That is, sometimes the younger characters are unaware of or unwilling to face some of the implications of the aging process. The following scenes provide ample evidence of the crucial differences in point of view between adults and children:

--Scene 3: When Grandpa asks, "I'm getting better, aren't I, Sara?", the young girl agrees, as if wishing that could be so will make it so.

--Scene 5: Sara discovers suddenly that Grandpa is dehydrated, evidence that she has not been paying close attention to his physical condition.

--Scene 7: Grandpa goes to the wrong bathroom, evidence that he requires skilled care.

--Scene 8: Grandpa asks Sara, "Suppose you had to spend on me for something important." Sara scoffs at this idea, but it is obvious that his question reveals the complexity of caring for someone who requires skilled physical care.

2) At the same time, ask your audience to notice to what extent Sara is attuned to Grandpa's needs in way that his son, Frank, sometimes fails to perceive. Sara also plays an important part as a role model for other young viewers because she is sensitive, caring, non-judgmental, and committed to helping Grandpa live his life to his fullest potential.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. A large country farm house, set on a high hill amid rich farm land in Northern Illinois. Inside the house, Frank McDermott and his Aunt Martha are discussing the condition of Frank's father, who has had another stroke. "The old man's crazy! He ought to be put away!" Frank says. Sarah, Frank's niece, enters the house. Frank is upset about a recent embarrassing episode involving Grandpa, caused by a recurring mental confusion. Martha admits, "Everything is always put on your shoulders, Frank." She mentions a nursing home as a possible solution for Grandpa, but she tells Frank, "You're the one who's going to have to decide."

   Sarah suggests that Grandpa's condition is improving, but Frank explodes, "He's forever messing into something. For as long as I can remember it's been, 'Frank do this! Frank do that!'" Finally he says, "I've got my own ideas on how this place ought to be run!" But Sarah won't give in. They continue to argue until Grandpa interrupts them.

2. Sarah runs to him and helps him back to bed. Inside his room, she asks, "Why'd you do it?" referring to the episode that angered Frank. She is surprised when Grandpa says he doesn't remember what he did. She warns, "Frank's going to put you in a nursing home!" He doesn't seem concerned. They share a quiet moment, and Grandpa remembers comforting her after her parents died in a car accident. He declares that if Frank keeps threatening him, he will drive away in his old truck and visit his daughter Clara in Chicago. Sarah reacts thoughtfully to this statement.

   Frank comes back in after Sarah leaves, and father and son argue about how to run the family farm. Grandpa clearly resists change, and Frank appears frustrated at what he sees as Grandpa's interference.

3. Sarah overhears Frank talking to the doctor on the phone. He mentions some of the unusual behaviors Grandpa has exhibited, and he arranges a meeting with the doctor to discuss placement of Grandpa in a nursing home.

   Sarah plots to help Grandpa escape this fate, and she shares her plans with a neighbor boy, Joey. We see the two young people at the county fair, where Joey reacts angrily to her idea. But she is determined to help Grandpa. Her plan: when Frank and Aunt Martha go to the State Fair, she and Joey will drive Grandpa to Chicago to see Aunt Clara. Then Uncle Richard, who is a doctor, can examine Grandpa and pronounce him sound of mind and body. Back at the farm, Sarah shows Joey the get-a-way vehicle, Grandpa's old truck, rusting amid weeds behind a shed. Joey complains that her idea is crazy, but she ignores his concern, because she is confident everything will work out.

4. Ready for the big trip to the State Fair. After Frank and Aunt Martha leave, Sarah runs inside the house and tells Grandpa, "We're taking you on a picnic--right now." The old battered pick-up truck pulls into the yard, Joey at the wheel. Sarah packs the food, and when she sees Joey outside, she says, "I knew I could count on you." Grandpa looks at the situation and says, "I never seen people in such a hurry to go on a picnic."

   A few minutes later they are almost spotted by a neighbor, who is heading for Grandpa's house to look after Sarah and him while Frank is gone. After this close call, Grandpa suddenly realizes they are not going on a picnic. But Sarah is determined to continue with her plan. She tells Grandpa that she is sure he is feeling better. After some thought, he says, "I am getting better, aren't I, Sarah?" She nods, delighted to hear him say that. They drive away. "Just think--me going to Chicago," he says.

5. When the neighbor arrives at the farm house, she finds a note from Sarah on the door and calls Frank.

   Through the windshield of the truck we see the rain pouring down. "Some picnic," Grandpa says. Sarah reminds him that they are not going on a picnic, but Grandpa is asleep.

   Back at the farm, Frank, who has returned from the State Fair with Aunt Martha, reads Sarah's note. They decide to call Aunt Clara in Chicago.

6. Sarah helps Grandpa down the hallway of a rooming house, somewhere on the road, where the three have stopped because of the bad weather, The landlady is suspicious, but she lets them stay. Sarah gives the woman a false name and address, and the woman says, "This isn't a nursing home!" Grandpa falls like a lump onto the bed, and Sarah suddenly realizes that he has become dehydrated. She sends Joey to fetch some water, angry with herself for forgetting about his special needs.

   At the farm, Aunt Clara (who is Frank's sister) and Uncle Richard arrive from Chicago. Everyone is quiet, remote from one another. They haven't seen one another for seven years--since Sarah's parents died in the accident.

   Martha mentions Frank's plan to have Grandpa declared incompetent and then committed to an institution. Clara questions this plan, but Frank says, "I will yet."

7. Sarah helps Grandpa sip some water. When he is comfortable, she goes downstairs to eat with Joey. A young woman serves them, and she teases Joey. He appreciates the attention, but Sarah is jealous.

   Later, Sarah brings some broth up to Grandpa, and he regains his alertness. "Martha's going to be frantic by now," he says. Sarah claims that all of this was her fault. When Grandpa says, "Maybe I belong in a home," Sarah cries, "I still need you!" She cites several examples of his past wisdom. "You know things! You always have!" She continues to plead with him, "Don't make us go back." He agrees to continue their journey.

8. The next morning, Sarah is asleep on the floor next to Grandpa's bed. When she wakes up, she realizes the bed is empty. Suddenly she hears a woman screaming down the hall. She races down the hall and inside the landlady's room she sees Grandpa, holding up his pants, looking embarrassed. The old woman screams that he tried to attack her. He looks up at Sarah and says weakly, "I thought it was the bathroom." Sarah fights off the landlady and takes hold of Grandpa, helping him out of the room and into the hall. The young woman who was teasing Joey in the kitchen suddenly appears and helps them lead Grandpa down the back stairs and out to the truck, where Joey had been sleeping. They leave immediately.

9. They drive in an urban setting, somewhere in Chicago. Sarah knows they need to find the University, since Aunt Clara lives nearby. Grandpa announces, "What you want to do is turn right." Joey follows his direction, and they end up at a beach on the lakeshore. Although she would love to stop at the beach, Sarah groans, "We don't have time to." Joey says, "Maybe we don't have time not to."

   We see Sarah and Joey running along the beach, while Grandpa sits on a bench in the park, sipping on a soda. Later, the two young people rest on the sand near Grandpa. Sarah recalls the argument Uncle Richard and Uncle Frank had after her parents died. The issue: who would take her in? She says proudly, "Grandpa was the only one who wanted me!" They return to the bench where Grandpa is sitting. He asks Sarah, "Suppose you had to depend on me for something important?" She scoffs at this, but he is serious. "Could you depend on me, or would you be scared to?" he asks. "That's just silly," she says.

10. They leave the beach. We can see downtown skyscrapers in the distance. Suddenly they see some University buildings, and Joey makes a quick turn--unfortunately heading the wrong way down a one-way street. When a police car approaches, and the officer requests that Joey back out of the street, Joey curses their luck--the reverse gear is broken. The police push the truck out of the street and learn that Joey has no license. Sarah starts to spin a tale about being from Peoria, but Grandpa cuts her off: "You don't lie to policemen."

11. A limousine drives up to the home farm. All get out, including Grandpa. Joey begins to walk away, headed for his parents' farm, but Sarah catches up to him. He says, "I didn't want to do this, but I'm glad we did." She says, "I think you're neat!"

   Inside the house all is quiet. Uncle Richard, who is a doctor, has examined Grandpa, and he admits that his physical condition is stable. However, after talking to the local physician, Richard agrees that Grandpa is suffering from serious mental confusion that will not improve. Frank asks, "So he could be found legally incompetent?" Richard agrees. When Sarah questions this conclusion, Frank declares, "I'm tired of explaining to you! And I'm sick to death of having to feel guilty!" He walks out of the house and notices Grandpa going out into the back yard. He starts toward the back yard, too.

12. Frank catches up with Grandpa, who addresses their conflict right away. "I'll put the land in trust for you with a guarantee that it will be yours

to manage for as long as you want." Frank looks puzzled. "All will be your way." But his bargain: "You've got to promise me I won't die any place else." Frank accepts Grandpa's offer, and the old man admits that Frank has often suffered by being the youngest son. The two men shake hands, smile at each other, and Frank heads back to the house.

Grandpa sits down on a bench in the back yard, and when Sarah comes out to see him, he tells her Frank has agreed not to send him to a nursing home. She hugs him in delight, but he says, "You're in for a lot of lecturing, girl." But then he adds, "But come right down to it, you did a good thing." She helps him up. "We'll take you on that picnic yet," she says. We watch them begin to climb the long hill back to the house.

--1977, Time-Life Films, 47 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What was your opinion of Sarah's decision to take Grandpa to Chicago? In what ways did their journey provoke the family to deal with some of their unresolved conflicts from the past?

2. At the end of the film Grandpa tells Sarah, "But come right down to it, you did a good thing." What do you think he means by that statement?

3. What was unique about the relationship between Sara and Grandpa? In what ways is their relationship a model intergenerational relationship?

4. Why did the filmmaker choose to tell this story from Sarah's point of view?

II. Sarah's Relationship to her Grandfather

5. Why is Sarah a special person to her grandpa? Why do they seem to get along so well?

6. What do you think Sarah learned about herself and about her relationships with older people through her adventure with Grandpa and Joey?

7. Why does Grandpa ask Sarah at the beach, "Suppose you had to depend on me for something important?" What is he trying to make Sarah understand?

II. Frank's Burden.

8. What do you think is the nature of the conflict between Frank and his father? What are some of the obstacles in the way of resolving that conflict?

9. How did you react to Frank's attitude toward Grandpa's condition? Do you think the film fairly portrays his responses to the family's crisis?

10. When Sarah and Grandpa return from Chicago, Frank confronts Sarah's stubborn defense of Grandpa's condition: "I'm tired of explaining to you. And I'm sick to death of having to fell guilty!" What do you think he feels guilty about?

11. Do you think the bargain Grandpa struck with Frank was fair to Frank? How did it help resolve the conflict between the two? Can you recall anything that Grandpa said to Frank in that scene that also may have helped heal some old wounds?

IV. General Questions

12. What evidence of Grandpa's character and values do we gain from his interaction with Sarah?

13. Did you feel the character of Grandpa was drawn with realistic touches, or was it a sentimentalized portrait of an old man? Can you recall the action in specific scenes that contributed to your response?

14. What do you think younger audiences could learn about relationships with older people by viewing this film?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Sarah's plot to help Grandpa escape the nursing home is marked by a child's imagination and enthusiasm. But in several scenes Sarah's lack of maturity prevents her from grasping the implications of particular situations. Consider the following questions for each of scenes below:

a) How did the filmmaker in the following scenes make the audience more aware of or more knowledgeable about aspects of her interaction with Grandpa that she was incapable of understanding?

b) What does Sarah's response to these interactions reveal about her character and her relationship to Grandpa?

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1) Scene 3, when Sarah tells Grandpa his condition is improving. When he says, "I am getting better, aren't I, Sarah?" she quickly agrees.

2) Scene 5, when Sarah realizes that Grandpa is dehydrated.

3) Scene 7, when Grandpa finds himself in a woman's bedroom instead of the bathroom.

4) Scene 8, when Grandpa asks her, "Suppose you had to depend on me for something important?" Her response: "That's just silly!"

What are some examples of the way Sarah showed a remarkable sensitive, caring, and understanding attitude toward her grandfather? How is Sarah a role model for other young people with regard to their relationships with older members of their family?

INTRODUCTION

This deceptively simple film portrays a remarkable relationship between a hundred-year-old black woman and a young boy, whose chief interest in life--at least on the rainy day we see him with Aunt Dew--is counting the pennies in her hundred penny box. This unadorned wooden box, perhaps once her hope chest or family luggage, is empty now, except for a small calico sack of pennies--each one from a different year--beginning with 1874, the year she was born. Most of them were given to her by her late husband as a special way or marking each of her birthdays.

Such a collection of pennies would have, of course, a literal monetary value, but the value of this coin collection goes beyond the money it would take to replace it. This box is a veritable treasure chest, a one-of-a-kind symbol of a hundred-year-old woman's entire life. The box is one of the last items that belongs to her personally, and the hundred pennies inside the box represent the memories of her youth, middle age, and old age. As Michael counts her pennies, she reminisces about the events of her life, including her marriage to Henry Thomas, the drowning of her twin boys, and her husband's death. The hundred penny box, then, represents the promise of her youth and her ties to the past. She fears being separated from the box just as many old people fear the loss of their home or other familiar surroundings.

The young boy, Michael, seems to realize intuitively Aunt Dew's compulsion to hold on to her box, even though Michael's mother considers it a nuisance, something to discard. He is determined to help Aunt Dew keep her hundred penny box. When Michael's mother tries to persuade him that Aunt Dew should give up the box, he confronts her with an ultimatum: "I said you can't take it!" His mother's response is predictable. Although she tries to be sympathetic with the old woman's and her son's needs, she is determined to throw away the old box. The film ends with no easy answers to their conflict: Michael stays near Aunt Dew, determined to be her protector against his mother's will as well as inheritor of the hundred penny box after she is gone. In addition, we gain some insights into Ruth's dilemma as the middle-aged caretaker, whose presence is not readily accepted by the older woman. Ruth is faced with defending her principles for maintaining her household while not losing touch with the intricacies of interpersonal relationships. The film emphasizes the timelessness and beauty of such relationships in its portrayal of Michael and Aunt Dew's intimate relationship.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Prepare audiences for the rich images conveyed in this film by asking them to take note of the many examples of meaningful touching that are portrayed in the interactions among the characters. The filmmaker focu-

ses our attention on the characters' own thoughts as well as their relationships by emphasizing moments of touching. Note that the use of closeups intensifies these images. Ask them to consider the mood that such images convey.

2) Ask your audience to listen closely to the subtle use of sound in the film; that is, the use of background music and other natural sounds, such as the tapping of shoes or the patter of rain against a window. Ask your audience to note how the filmmaker complements these sounds with appropriate visual images. For instance, he uses stunning extreme closeups, as if to intensify the beauty of the natural objects being portrayed: the old woman's hands, the different pennies--some Indian head pennies, some zinc pennies from World War II, or Lincoln head pennies from the 1960's. Wherever possible the filmmaker attempts to capture the inherent beauty of the characters' expressions and the delicate art of the coins.

3) Prepare your audience for the conflicts being portrayed in the film by noting that one of the main characters is cast in the role of the caregiver, whose burden of caring for Aunt Dew is complicated by her son's desire for a meaningful intergenerational relationship.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We hear a woman's voice humming a spiritual, then through a series of closeups we focus on a small wooden chest on the floor, raindrops on a window pane, the old woman's hands folded in her lap, and the sneakers on the feet of a small boy. As her humming continues, we see the two in a small room--the old woman seated in a rocking chair, the young boy lying in bed, restlessly tapping his sneakers together.

   The young boy goes to the window, looks over to the wooden box, and as he looks out into the rain we hear in his memory the voice of a woman, evidently his mother, saying, "That box goes in the furnace today."

   The boy sits on the box, thinking. Aunt Dew addresses him as John Boy. She asks him to put on some of her music. When she asks him to take out her victrola, the boy tells her that his mother threw it out. "Your Momma gonna throw me out some of these days," Aunt Dew says. The boy puts an old, warped record onto the small record player. As the gospel music begins to play, Aunt Dew slowly get up from the rocking chair and sways to the music, as if dancing in place. Meanwhile, the boy, on the bed again, asks, "Where you put your pennies if you lose your hundred penny box?" She says, "When I lose my hundred penny box, I lose me." She continues dancing to the music. "Ninety-nine years I've had that box." When he mentions his mother, Aunt Dew asks, "What's your Momma's name? Who is that woman in my kitchen?" The boy snaps back, "Momma's name is Ruth. And this isn't your house. We went to get you, and now you live with us." As if struck by his words, she sits down, holding her head in her hand.

The boy puts away the record. "Your Daddy John was the only-est one ever cared about me," she says. We see an extreme closeup of her aged hands, then focus on the boy, looking at her.

2. Aunt Dew looks out the window at a small tree and begins to reminisce. As the camera focuses on the window, the small tree is replaced with a clear image of a large gnarled oak tree, and we hear Aunt Dew recall the time John Boy's father would climb that tree as a young boy. We see an image of an old rowboat, overturned on shore, appparently long unused, as Aunt Dew remembers the time Big John and Junior went for a ride in the boat. She didn't want them to go. An extreme closeup of the weathered wood of the old boat dissolves to show the gray water, swirling gently. "I looked out and see them in the water. Then there wasn't nothing. Both gone."

3. Closeup of the boy's face. Remembering his mother's threat, he turns to Aunt Dew and asks, "Where can we hide the box?" She says, "Why you want to hide my hundred-penny box?" She tells him to get it out. "If I don't see my box, I don't see me." But the only thing inside the box is a small calico sack, filled with pennies. "Dewbette Thomas is a hundred years old," she says. The boy spills the pennies out of the sack onto the bottom of the box. "I've got pennies to prove it--each year." As the camera scans across the scattered coins, each from a different year, we hear the strains of gospel music in the background. The boy holds up one of the pennies. We see Aunt Dew's face in closeup. "1874, the year I was born." The boy begins to count, dropping the pennies one at a time into the sack, while Aunt Dew continues her reminiscing. As the boy keeps counting, we begin to see the pennies in extreme closeups and hear the gospel music again in the background. We see details on the coins that emphasize their beauty, their uniqueness, and the history embodied in each: Indian head pennies, zinc pennies from World War II, each coin from a different year. Aunt Dew adds her reminiscing to the boy's counting: "1901, birth of my twin boys . . . 1930, Depression, Henry Thomas died, after he put the 56th penny in my box."

4. Suddenly the boy's mother, Ruth, opens the door to Aunt Dew's room and tells Aunt Dew that it is time for her nap. Aunt Dew complains that she isn't tired. When she refers to the boy as John Boy, Ruth says, "His name is Michael." Ruth asks Michael to leave the room so that Aunt Dew can rest.

   He goes into his parents' bedroom and sits on their bed. As he looks at a photograph of his parents, showing them together, smiling warmly, we hear his mother's voice from an earlier time. She complains to her husband that Aunt Dew has been unresponsive to her care. "I care about her, John, but she's making me miserable in my own house." But her husband reminds her that Aunt Dew took him in after Big John and Junior drowned. "Hold tight, Ruth. She knows we want her."

   Michael goes into Aunt Dew's room again and sits next to her. She is lying under the covers, crying softly. "Aunt Dew--it's me, Michael." She doesn't answer.

5. He goes into the kitchen, where his mother is fixing dinner. He tells her Aunt Dew is crying. "When you've lived as long as Aunt Dew's lived, sometimes you just cry." Sensing his uneasiness, she takes him into her bedroom to show him a present intended for Aunt Dew--a small redwood box his father made

when he was in high school. She tells him, "It's really perfect for that little sack of pennies." He looks unimpressed. She sits on the bed and says, "You're the one who loves that big old box." She tells him Aunt Dew does not need that box. But Michael is firm. "I said you can't take it!" His mother orders him to sit in a chair in the living room.

6. But he doesn't stay in the chair long. Soon he is in Aunt Dew's room again, sitting next to her on the bed. He apologizes for his mother's meanness toward her, but she says, "There ain't nobody mean to Dewbette Thomas, 'cause Dewbette Thomas ain't mean to no one." She asks him where her box is. He carries it across the room again, putting it at the foot of her bed. "Watch out while I sleep." But then she looks at Michael and says fondly, "You're John's baby." She tells him he can count her pennies again. As he gets them out, she begins her reminiscing at the date they had left off before she began her nap.

Suddenly she asks, "Where you, boy? Come here." He sits on the bed, and she lifts her arm to touch his face with her hands. She begins to talk about her house. Michael tells her that he took a picture of her house. She says, "My house is bigger than your picture." He shows her the picture, and we see a modest home in the country, with a tree near it. In a closeup, we see Aunt Dew respond, "Your picture much too small." Michael asks, "Do you wish you was back at your house?" She answers, her voice charged with emotion, "I'm going back."

Michael looks at her and asks, "You sad?" She turns her face away from him, tears in her eyes, and says, "Hush, boy." He asks her if he can count the pennies again. "Go ahead and count," she says in a low voice. "When your hundred and first birthday come, I'll put in a new penny like you said." He moves closer to her and begins to stroke her arm. "Are your arms a hundred years old?" he asks innocently. She nods. He touches her face lightly, then touches her hands and fingers. "Is your face, your eyes, and your fingers a hundred hears old?" She says, "John, I'm tired. Don't talk so." But Michael perserveres. "How did you get to be a hundred years old? Her answer: "You have to have you a hundred penny box." "Where did you get it from?" "Someone special," she says. "And soon as they give it to you you got to be careful lest it disappear. Then she begins to sing a gospel song, "Take my hand, precious Lord," and Michael lies next to her, looking out the window at the rain. The gospel music continues, and then we see closeups of the rain on the window and the hundred penny box on the floor.

--1979, Churchill Films, 18 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What are some of the images that stand out in your memory after viewing the film?

2. If Michael were asked what is special about Aunt Dew, what do you think he would say?

3. What did the hundred penny box come to represent to you as you watched the film?

II. The Meaning of Visual Images.

4. In the scene where Michael counted the pennies as Aunt Dew reminisced, why did the filmmaker include the many extreme closeups of the coins?

5. In what ways did the sense of touch play an important role in this film? Do you recall a specific scene where touch was particularly meaningful?

III. Aunt Dew and the Past.

6. Why is Aunt Dew living with Michael and his parents?

7. Why does Aunt Dew address Michael as "John Boy"? Who does she think he is?

8. In the scene that showed the old wooden boat, we hear Aunt Dew recall, "I looked out and saw them in the water. Then there wasn't nothing. Both gone." What do you think she is referring to? Who were Big John and Junior?

9. When Michael comes back into Aunt Dew's room after she started her nap, she is lying in bed, still awake, but crying softly. Why is she crying?

10. What does Aunt Dew mean when she says, "When I lose my hundred-penny box, I lose me"?

IV. Ruth's Struggle.

11. What is your attitude toward Ruth as you view her interactions with Michael and Aunt Dew?

12. What advice would you offer Ruth regarding ways she might improve her relationship with Aunt Dew?

13. Why isn't Ruth's idea of giving Michael the little redwood box going to be a satisfactory replacement for the old wooden chest from Michael's point of view?

V. The Message of the Hundred Penny Box.

14. Were your surprised when you learned that the only thing inside the wooden box was a sackful of pennies? Why wasn't there anything else inside the box?

15. What does the hundred penny box mean to Aunt Dew? Why is it so important to Michael?

16. At the end of the film, when Michael asks Aunt Dew how a person gets to be a hundred years old, what does she mean by her answer, "you got to have a hundred penny box"? Why does it need to come from "someone special"?

VI. A Special Relationship.

17. What does the filmmaker gain by telling this story through Michael's eyes?

18. What are some of the things Michael is too young to understand in the film?

19. What do you think Michael gains through his association with Aunt Dew? What does Aunt Dew gain through her association with Michael?

VII. General Questions.

20. Which character is suffering the most in this film? Why do you think that is the case?

21. Do you think the filmmaker's decision to have an older actress play the role of Dewbette Thomas contributed to our response to this story?

22. In what way did the music contribute to your enjoyment and/or understanding of the film's message?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Encourage members of your audience to list the most significant examples of touch that are depicted in the film. They may list examples at the bottom of this sheet. After viewing the film, ask your audience to share their reactions to their examples. In each case ask your audience to consider the following questions:

a) What mood does the image of touching convey? What feelings are provoked by its use? (Note how the use of closeups adds intensity to the image.)

b) How does the image of touching help us understand what a character is thinking at a given moment?

c) How does the image of touching help us understand the basis of the interaction between characters in a given scene?

Examples of Touching:

1) AUNT DEW ALONE:

2) MICHAEL ALONE:

3) MICHAEL AND HIS MOTHER:

4) MICHAEL AND AUNT DEW:

INTRODUCTION

This French film (with English subtitles) brings together an older woman and a young man for an unlikely conversation, as the two sit together on a park bench waiting for separate rendezvous. At first the two characters appear to have nothing in common: the older woman is dressed in dark clothes, wears a hat, and seems to be simply passing the time. The young man has a well-groomed appearance, and he sits apart from her, looking confident in his leather jacket. At first their conversation concerns the usual: she asks him for the time, he asks her if she wants one of his cigarettes. But before long the two begin a conversation in earnest, stimulated by the older woman's response to his cool nonchalance. When she questions his jaded attitude toward male/female relationships, telling him at one point, "You are lucky to be waiting for someone you don't love," he cannot resist continuing the conversation. Soon the older woman discloses details of an affair she has been having with an older married man for the past several years. She tells the young man that the two often meet in this park during the spring and summer months, but after the long winter she is not sure he will return. In fact, she is not even sure he is still alive.

When the young man realizes the depth of passion that is the basis of the older couple's relationship, he tries to encourage the older woman, telling her not to worry. But her fear of losing the man she loves overshadows his concern. At one point she gently reprimands the young man for his lack of understanding, saying, "You have never been in love." Although she withdraws her criticism, he appears to accept the truth behind her words. His relationships with women lack the intensity and meaning of this older woman's affair. Her crisis has begun to suggest to him some of the complexities of human intimacy.

Their conversation ends when a young woman approaches the park bench, apologizing for her lateness. As if to underscore the young man's attitude toward relationships, we hear him respond, "It doesn't matter." What does matter is the outcome of the older woman's situation. Suddenly she stands and looks toward the distance. She turns to the young man and says softly, "It's him. He's here. One more winter." As she walks joyously toward her lover, the young man acknowledges the older woman's passionate response to life. The film ends as the two older people meet again, their affair having survived one more winter.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Announce that the film contains French dialogue (with English subtitles). Remind your audience that the subtitles are meant to complement the visual images. If they concentrate primarily on reading the subtitles, they are likely to miss some of visual communication provided by the filmmaker. Ask them to concentrate on the visual images that open and close the film, the editing that helps us compare the two main characters' experiences, and the use of music that comments on the characters' experiences.

2) Tell your audience that this film depicts the conversation between two strangers, an older woman and a young man as they sit together on a park bench. Ask them to consider how a filmmaker will make such a simple story interesting to viewers. What film techniques might be employed to vary the setting or the mood of the film? How will the filmmaker overcome the limitations of excessive dialogue?

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The camera focuses on a carousel in motion, as we hear operatic music in the background. The music continues, and we see an image of bare trees against the winter sky. The camera moves through the park, where we see two people, a young man and an old woman, seated apart from each other on a bench. She is dressed in a bulky coat and wears a hat.

   They seem intent on their private thoughts. After a moment of silence the old woman looks over to him and asks him for the time. Then she asks him if he is waiting for someone. He nods, and she says, "Isn't waiting upsetting?" But he says nonchalantly, "Either she comes or she doesn't."

   She appears surprised. "That's all there is to it?" His ready answer: "Sure. It's her or another. There are plenty of girls around."

   She says, "Yes, that is true at your age." He smiles at this remark, but when she looks away for a moment, he looks at her closely as if noticing her age and physical appearance for the first time. From his point of view we see her face, her dark clothes, and the heavy black shoes she is wearing.

2. The young man offers her a cigarette. She declines and mentions her husband's death--from lung cancer. He laughs at the irony of her statement, but she continues in a serious voice, and after asking him his name, says, "You are lucky to be waiting for someone you don't love." Now his curiosity is aroused, and he asks her what she means by this remark. She answers simply, "Because you are untroubled." Looking away, she adds, "And I am afraid, you see."

   The camera leaves them momentarily and shows us scenes of the bare trees again, the snow-covered ground, and an empty park bench as we hear her voice: "We used to spend every afternoon beside each other, a friend of mine and I. Every summer and spring and autumn when it was nice. But this winter has been very long. I don't even know if he is still alive." Then we see the old woman again, a sad expression on her face.

3. The young man asks earnestly, "Why haven't you written or telephoned him?" she hesitates. "He's married." The young man smiles knowingly, and says, "I understand."

   But she corrects him. "It's not what you think. He's my age. But his wife is jealous." The young man reacts sympathetically. She continues, "Last autumn he was rather uneasy. He said, 'Will we see each other in the spring, Germaine?' Do you think he had a premonition?" We see a closeup of her face, and she is crying.

The young man reacts sensitively and leans toward her. "Don't worry, He'll come. Fifteen minutes after a whole winter. That's not long." But she says, "You don't understand. You have never been in love." Then she sees by his expression that her words have hurt him. She touches his arm reassuringly. "I didn't mean to say that." He accepts her gesture, and they both look outward again, waiting.

4. She turns to him. "Why don't you love her, Jean?" He says, "That's just the way it goes." He looks up and we see the young woman he has been waiting for, coming up the walk. When she reaches the bench, the two kiss, and she apologizes for being late. "It doesn't matter," he says. Suddenly the old woman stands and looks toward the distance. The young man stands up too. "It's him," she says. "He's here." She turns to the young man and says, "One more winter." After she leaves, he remains standing, looking after her. The young woman asks him what the old woman was talking about. "Nothing," he says. "She is just a little crazy."

5. Then we begin to see alternating shots of the older couple as they walk toward each other. These images are accompanied by an operatic duet sung by a tenor and a soprano. The music continues to build to a climax as the two meet, and he takes her hand in his two hands, holding her affectionately. They stand apart from each other, gazing into each other's eyes.

   The last scene returns to the images of the moving carousel as the music continues.

--1976, Films, Inc., 15 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What did you find most unexpected in the interaction between the young man and the old woman? As you viewed the film, were you able to identify with one character more than the other?

2. What are some of the ways this film would be effective in addressing negative stereotypes toward older people?

II. Setting the Mood of the Film.

3. What do you think he filmmaker meant to convey by using the image of the carousel in the opening and closing scenes of the film? Did the use of that image contribute to your understanding of the film's message?

4. What do you think the filmmaker meant to convey by using the following images: the bare trees (scenes 1,2), the snow-covered ground (scene 2), and the empty park bench (scene 2)? How do these images help create the appropriate mood for the film?

5. How did you react to the operatic music used in the opening and closing scenes of the film? How did that music help us understand the basis of the old woman's relationship with the old man?

III. Attitudes Toward Relationships.

6. Can you summarize the young man's attitude regarding his relationship with women? How does his attitude differ from Germaine's?

7. How did you react when you learned that Germaine was involved in a relationship with a married man? What do you think that relationship meant to Germaine?

8. What does the film communicate about the way we relate to time in our lives, especially in the context of maintaining serious human relationships?

9. When Germaine cries (scene 3), and the young man consoles her, she says, "You don't understand. You've never been in love." Is she right?

10. What do you think the young man meant when he told his lover that the old woman was "just a little crazy"?

IV. An Intergenerational Relationship.

11. Where in the film did you see evidence of the two characters sharing their true feelings?

12. Did you feel that the young man ever responded to Germaine as an individual, rather than as an "old person"? Can you recall examples of such interaction in the film?

13. What do you think the young man and the old woman gained from their interaction in the film?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Although the basis of this film is a conversation between an older woman and a young man, who happen to be sitting on the same park bench, the filmmaker conveys ideas about the depth and complexity of interpersonal relationships by complementing the dialogue with diverse visual images. As you view the film, consider what ideas and feelings are stimulated by the following images. In each case, use the following questions to guide your responses:

a) How does the image contribute to the mood of the film? How does its position in the film affect our emotional response?

b) How does the image contribute to our understanding of the older woman's experience?

c) How does the image help us understand the comparison being made between the older woman's attitudes toward her lover and the young man's attitudes toward his lover?

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1. The carousel we see at the beginning and ending of the film.

2. Germaine says, "Yes, that is true at your age" (scene 1). Then, from his point of view we see a closeup of her face, her dark clothes, and the heavy black shoes she is wearing.

3. Germaine says, "And I am afraid, you see." The filmmaker leaves the scene at the park bench, and we see bare trees against the sky (scene 1 and 2) and the snow-covered ground (scene 2).

4. Continuing the above scene, we see an empty park bench (scene 2), as Germaine recalls, "We used to spend every afternoon beside each other, a friend of mine and I."

5. At the end of the film (scene 5) we see alternating shots of the older woman and the man she has been waiting for, accompanied by an operatic duet sung by a tenor and a soprano.

INTRODUCTION

No humanistic film on aging is as well-known or as highly regarded as Peege, the story of a family's Christmas visit to a nursing home, where Ethel, known affectionately by the family as Peege, has lived for eight years in the same room. Although she is blind now, Peege is aware of her surroundings and receptive to the reminiscences that can tap her rich store of memories. But almost everyone in the family appears unable to interact meaningfully with Peege, because they bring to this visit their own fears and insecurities about aging.

The exception is Greg, the oldest son, who has not seen Peege for two years. Greg responds to Peege and to his own aging in ways that are different from the other members of his family. His father is unable to deal with his own feelings of grief when he sees his mother, whose disabilities make her a shadow of what she once had been; his mother feels threatened by fears and anxieties regarding her own aging; and his two younger brothers lack the intimate memories of a shared past with Peege. Only Greg is able to overcome similar barriers and reach out to Peege. Although he is shocked at seeing the disabilities Peege suffers from, he controls his fears and anxieties toward the losses implicit in aging and reclaims (through reminiscences) the storehouse of memories he has of growing up with Peege.

Because the other members of his family are tense and anxious during their visit, Greg feels uncomfortable and isolated from them, and when they begin to say their goodbye's, Greg stays back to be alone with Peege. This second "visit" with Peege is profoundly different from the earlier visit, and the contrasts between Greg's interaction with Peege during the few minutes he is alone with her and the earlier lack of meaningful interaction between Peege and the other members of the family make the ending of this film compelling and unforgettable. Audiences who have seen Peege before never forget the ending scene, which shows Peege sitting alone in the room now that Greg has rejoined his family in their car. In a closeup we see her face brighten and her eyes shine as she breaks into a broad and satisfied smile. Greg's concern and caring gestures have touched Peege. Likewise, viewers are touched by the celebration of life and the beauty of human relationships that shines through her smile.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

Since Peege is a well-known film on aging, and often is employed in introductory classes in gerontology, discussion leaders may want to find out how many members of the audience have seen Peege before. If many people have seen the film before, consider asking some of the them to share the context of their previous viewing experience. Ask them to concentrate on a different aspect of the film in this viewing: perhaps they can focus on the experiences of a character they didn't identify with in their earlier viewing; since they already know the outcome of the film, perhaps they can pay closer attention to the interactions among characters in this viewing.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES *Peege*

You may want to announce to your audience that *Peege* is considered a classic film on aging; that is, although it has been in circulation for more than ten years, film users return to it again and again in diverse contexts. Ask your audience to consider what criteria are applied when categorizing a film like *Peege* as *classic*. You may want to return to this question after showing the film and elicit a sampling of responses from the audience.

From a technical point of view, *Peege* is a sophisticated film, and for those viewers who have an interest in the filmmaker's control over his material, there are several points to be made regarding the editing, composition, lighting, the use of camera techniques, and the use of a subjective point of view:

EDITING:

1) An important example of editing in the film is the use of several flashbacks, which interrupt the narrative. Besides helping the viewer identify with Greg, the flashbacks break up what otherwise might have been long and drawn-out scenes. In some ways the flashbacks relieve the tension of the visitation scene, for their joyousness and energy are a marked contrast to the somber mood in Peege's room. The flashbacks also suggest some of the stages of Peege's aging process. Just as Greg grows older through the flashbacks, Peege ages, too, experiencing some physical infirmities in her later years.

2) In scenes 1 and 2 the director arranges the conversation between the members of the family around a limited number of shots, separating the characters effectively and focusing the scene on our identification with Greg, the oldest. Note how the filmmaker separates the characters: a) shots of the two younger sons in the back seat, b) shots of the mother and father in the front seat, c) shots of the mother and father in the front seat, with Greg visible behind them, in the back seat, d) shots of Greg, alone, sitting by the window in the back seat, and e) closeups of the father, in the front seat. Using this shot selection, the filmmaker conveys several important ideas:

   -- the oldest son is separated from his younger brothers, who lack his emotional attachment to the past
   -- the parents in the front seat seem separated, even opposed, in the way they approach the subject of Peege's condition
   -- the shots of the parents in the front seat, but with Greg visible behind and between them, portrays Greg as a person who is trying to cut through the triteness of the conversation and introduce sensitive subject matter

3) As the car arrives at the nursing home (scene 3), the viewer has had as yet no visual information to form an opinion of what the nursing home will be like. However, when the director alternates three shots of old people pulling back window shades to peer out at the visitors with shots of the family's car pulling up in the driveway of the nursing home, the viewer is able to respond to the apparent loneliness and isolation of the older people in the rooms behind those curtains.

COMPOSITION:

When Greg enters the room (scene 4), he sits on the opposite side of the room, and the audience sits with him and watches the awkwardness and discomfort of the rest of the members of the family. We see that the family is fragmented and isolated from each other and from Peege. The two boys sit by the window, the parents sit across from Peege.

Compare this separation with the composition of the last few scenes. In scene 9 Greg walks up to sit next to Peege so that he can touch her. Eventually, the two of them are shown to be almost in an embrace, Peege's head resting against Greg's, and his hand stroking her hair.

LIGHTING:

Compare the scenes filmed in the present with the scenes in the flashbacks. Note how warm tones dominate the flashbacks, whereas cold, blue-gray tones abound in the nursing home scenes.

In scene 4, the first time we see Peege, watch for a light shining on Peege's eyes, which seems to emanate from a mysterious source. Although Peege is blind, the director suggests here that she possesses a vision of sorts, a light that is part of her being, and which even adds to her beauty. The mother had said, "Now she doesn't even know if we're there or not," but this light falling on Peege's eyes is evidence that she is aware of her surroundings and able to interact meaningfully with those around her. Peege's association with this light also prepares the viewer of the final scene, when Peege's face metaphorically "lights up."

CAMERA TECHNIQUES:

Several times in the film the director uses extreme closeups to magnify our subjective reaction to the action in the scene. Three examples:

--In scene 3, Greg and his brother examine an ivory-soap Bible, put together by Girl Scouts and then given to each of the residents. "Aren't they sweet?" the nurse adds.

--In scene 4, Greg notices Peege's crippled hand and the catheter, his first real evidence of her incapacitation.

--When Greg reminisces about the footstool, in scene 7, the viewer sees a brief extreme closeup of the needlepoint Peege had made herself years ago, and this detail, showing the beauty of her handiwork, adds to the meaning Greg feels in his memory.

POINT OF VIEW:

Throughout the film, the viewer shares Greg's point of view. To accomplish this, the director often begins with a shot of Greg alone in the frame, sometimes in a closeup. We see him reacting to his surroundings, then see in the next shot or series of shots what he is reacting to. In scene 3, for example, the surroundings are the three rooms Greg looks into briefly as he walks down the hallway. After each shot inside the residents' rooms, the director comes back to a shot of Greg, reacting to what he has seen. This technique is effective because the viewer, in seeing what Greg sees, is able to record a reaction as strong as Greg's. In doing so, we feel what Greg feels.

During the film this choice of point of view also determines how we judge the other characters and their interactions with Peege. Notice that all the flashbacks in the film are from Greg's point of view. Moreover, in the nursing home scenes, we watch with Greg the other family members unable to reach Peege. They appear trapped by their own anxieties and insecurity. Only Greg is immune from similar problems. The consistent use of Greg's point of view has a profound effect on the manner in which the audience will receive the portrayal of Greg's mother. Discussion leaders should be aware of the audience's tendency to attribute negative characteristics to the responses made by Greg's mother. Rather than allowing viewers to judge Greg's mother as completely insensitive and/or uncaring toward Peege, discussion leaders should balance the viewer's response by taking into account the evidence that many of her reactions are determined by her fears, anxieties, and insecurity.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The film begins with a family leaving their house to make a Christmas visit. Besides the parents, there are three sons. As the car travels down the road, we follow their conversation inside the car. In the back seat, the younger sons seem disconnected from the past, out of touch with the memories of past Christmases that are first mentioned by the mother. In contrast, Greg, the oldest son, who is sitting next to them by the window, seems attuned to the past. The camera focuses on him, looking out the window, lost in thought.

   His response leads to a flashback of Greg and his grandmother, Peege, on an outing when Greg was a small boy. We see the two of them alone in Peege's car, while she gives Greg an ice cream cone and shares hers with their dog. Peege is bubbly, excitable, almost raucous in her mannerisms.

2. We return to the scene in the car. We learn that Peege, who is now blind, has been in the nursing home eight years, and Greg has not seen her for two years. This scene portrays the reactions of the family to Peege's condition. The mother's view: "Give me a pill if I ever turn out like her." The father suffers in silence. Greg asks sensitive, probing questions, revealing his concern for Peege. He even asks, "Dad, can she chew?" The mother repeatedly answers questions that are addressed to her husband, but Greg keeps pressing his father for answers. Later he asks, "How long do you think she'll last? At first the mother looks at her husband for an answer, but receiving no signal, she responds, "This will probably be your last visit."

3. They arrive at the home, and as they drive up, we see several shots of old people pulling back the window shades and peering out at the visitors. Inside the home, the air suddenly becomes charged with the tension of the family's discomfort at their surroundings. The mother's reaction: "This place always smells so bad." The nurse comes out to tell them that Peege is "ready" to be seen.

   The family follows the nurse down the hallway to Peege's room.

Greg is the last to follow, and as he walks slowly past open doors, we see his point of view as he looks briefly into some of the rooms. He sees an old person in bed, another being helped out of a wheelchair, and a group of residents watching television.

4. As Greg enters Peege's room, we again see the scene from his point of view. We see an old woman with gray hair seated in a large chair in the far corner of the room. Her chair faces the window. When Greg says, "How are you, Nanna?" we see a closeup of Peege, her eyes spotlighted by a warm, soft light.

   As the visit begins, Greg remains on the opposite side of the room, set apart from the rest of the family. After an awkward beginning, the mother attempts to inject some humor and liveliness into the scene by playfully spraying some cologne (Peege's first Christmas present from the family) into the air. But this gesture seems only to deepen the sense of gloom felt in the air. While this is going on, we see that Greg is again deep in thought: from his point of view we see him notice Peege's gnarled hand and then the catheter that is only partly concealed by some of Peege's clothing.

   The mother hands Peege a cookie, and we see the two hands reach out, but Peege's hand can only grasp at the cookie, and some crumbs fall away when she holds it up to her mouth. We see on the mother's face a momentary look of dread, but she smiles bravely and continues the conversation. As the family begins to tell Peege the current events they are involved in, Greg begins to look around the room, and this leads to a second flashback.

   Filmed in warm tones, we see the young Greg in the arms of Peege at one of his birthday celebrations. She holds him lovingly in her arms and laughs heartily, letting him taste some of the frosting on the cake.

5. Back to the nursing home. As the conversations continue, and Peege seems unresponsive to it, Greg again notices some of his surroundings.

   This leads to another flashback. We see Peege with the young child Greg, winding up her old victrola and then dancing around the room with him, wildly spinning and weaving about. While they dance, the shot dissolves into another shot of Peege and Greg dancing, but this time both are older, and Greg now is an adolescent. They keep dancing, and the shot again dissolves into a shot of an older Peege and an older Greg dancing, showing the passage of time and the continuity of experience.

6. We return to the present. The father helps Peege unwrap another of her presents, a small reindeer, stuffed in bright red cloth. He lets her touch the reindeer, and she holds it up to her face. Here the father begins to break down, and he has to get up and stand at the window in order to avoid crying in front of his family.

   Standing at the window, he mentions Peege's "chipmunk friends" outside, and the youngest son suddenly recalls a little chipmunk, Scooter, that the family once had as a pet. Peege remembers Scooter. Greg smiles at this, but the father, not picking up on this happy memory from the past, says, "We have another present for you." The father opens the box. A silk nightgown is inside.

7. Greg suddenly spies an old footstool partially hidden under the bed he is sitting next to. He pulls it out and holds it up, saying, "I remember this." We see everyone on the other side of the room look toward Greg, and

when he says, "I remember crawling up on this stool," we see a closeup of Peege, her face aglow as the memory moves her. But then the mother says, "That was quite awhile ago," and Greg puts the stool away.

Another flashback, this time with a teenaged Greg who is staying at Peege's house. Late at night, they watch a horror movie, and Peege brings out some wine. As before, she is loud, excitable, laughing heartily and making fun of her clumsiness. When she gets a kink in her back, Greg helps her to the couch and puts the footstool under her legs. Peege laughs at her infirmity, and they have a rousing good time.

8. Return to the nursing home. Peege begins to cough, and when her coughing continues, we see the mother staring at Peege in horror. No one offers to call a nurse. Suddenly the visit is over, and everyone makes hurried goodbyes. Everyone except mother kisses Peege goodbye.

   As they leave the room, the mother calls out, "We'll see you next time, Peege."

9. We see a long shot of the room, Peege quiet in her chair. From Greg's point of view, we see a series of closeups of the Christmas wrappings, cookie crumbs, and the red stuffed reindeer. Greg walks toward Peege, not stopping until he is sitting next to her. "This is Greg," he says. "I know that somewhere inside there is the Grandma I remember, alive, laughing." He begins to reminisce, recalling all of the memories we saw in the flashbacks noted above. His constant refrain is, "Do you remember?" She answers each time, "Yes." While he talks, he reaches out and touches her, stroking her hand, then the side of her head.

   When she begins to cough again, he shows concern, asking her if she is all right or if he should call a nurse. But she says no. He tries to make her more comfortable in the chair.

10. In a flashback we see Peege entertaining the young boy Greg and his friend Debbie. The children have just come in from playing in the snow, and Peege rubs their feet and entertains them by reading them stories. She embellishes her story-telling with her raucous tone and silly mannerisms. "I remember," Peege says, Greg keeps talking: "Your laugh would always make me happy," He sits close to her, almost as if in an embrace, and he rests her head against his, stroking her hair. He asks her what she thinks about all day, and her answer is, "Going home." He asks, "You're not lonely here, are you?" "No."

    Suddenly he says, "I've got to go . . . My thoughts and my prayers are with you. And I love you," As he leaves, he is crying.

    Outside, his mother asks, "We wondered what had happened to you." He doesn't answer, but simply gets into the car, and as they drive off, he looks back over his shoulder at the home.

11. Back to a closeup of Peege, who almost imperceptibly at first, but then more clearly, begins to smile. As she smiles wider, her eyes shine warmly, and we know for sure that she has been touched by Greg's reminiscences.

    When the credits go up to end the film, we see various shots of old photographs of Peege and Greg, experiencing some of the happy times we saw in the flashbacks.

--1973, Phoenix Films, 28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. Which character do you identify with most in this film? Why?

2. What was your impression of the Peege you saw in the flashbacks? How did those feelings compare with your response to the Peege you saw in the nursing home?

3. What are some of the ways this film affects our emotions and our attitudes toward the aging process, as well as our own aging?

II. On the Way to the Nursing Home: In the Car.

(The following questions focus on the introductory section of the film, shown in Scenes 1 and 2)

4. How do Greg's questions about Peege's condition show that his attitudes toward Peege are different from the ones held by other members of the family? Why do you think this is the case?

5. How does the director help us identify with Greg in these scenes? Why does the director want us to identify with Greg at all?

6. Why does Greg keep addressing his questions in the car to his father? Why is Greg's father so quiet in the car?

7. What is your attitude toward Greg's mother after seeing her in these early scenes? Why does she say, "Give me a pill if I ever turn out like her"?

8. At one point Greg's mother says that Peege "doesn't even know if we're here or not" Why does she say this? On the basis of what you see later in this film, is she right? How do you know?

III. The Visit with Peege.

9. What intentions lay behind the family's gifts of perfume, cookies, a stuffed animal, and a nightgown for Peege? How do you think Peege responded to these gifts?

10. Although everyone participates in the conversation, all appear to be uncomfortable. Why?

11. Who is suffering the most in this scene?

12. Both the mother and the father break down and cry in this scene. Why?

13. Why is the mention of the chipmunk Scooter, and Peege's memory of the pet, a potential turning point in the conversation?

14. When Greg sees the old footstool with its needlepoint covering, and launches into a reminiscence, what do you think was his reaction when his mother said "That was quite awhile ago."?

IV. Greg Alone with Peege.

15. When Greg is alone with Peege, his real visit with her begins. What are some of the specific things Greg does that makes this visit different from the earlier one?

16. What is the reason Greg keeps asking Peege, "Do you remember?" What is he trying to do?

17. What do you think Greg learns from his visit with Peege? Does he learn anything about older people? Does he learn anything about himself?

18. Why does Peege smile at the end of the film? What effect did that smile have on you?

IV. General Questions.

19. Did the film make you think of a friend or relative who is an older person? What sort of thoughts did the film evoke concerning your relationship to them?

20. What do we learn about the role of reminiscing in the lives of both young and old people by watching this film?

21. What specific positive attitudes and actions can we learn from this film with regard to our future visits to a nursing home?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET A

Most audiences viewing Peege respond strongly to the portrayal of Greg's mother in the film. Follow her character through the film and consider her actions and dialogue by asking the following questions for each example:

1) What do her words or actions reveal about her feelings at that moment?
2) What do her words or actions reveal about her attitudes toward the aging process or toward her own aging?
3) How do her words or actions affect our response to and/or judgment of her character?

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1) In the car she recalls Peege's excitement about Christmas in previous years. "Now," she tells Greg, "she doesn't even know we're here."

2) When she describes Peege's physical condition, she says, "Give me a pill if I ever turn out like her."

3) When the family arrives at the nursing home, she looks around and says, "This place always smells so bad."

4) When the family enters the room, she tells Peege that the entire family has come to visit her; then she sprays some cologne into the air so that Peege can "smell" her first Christmas present.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE . . .

5) Greg holds up a footstool he finds under the bed and reminds Peege that he remembers seeing it at her cabin. Peege brightens at this reminiscence, but Greg's mother says, "That was quite a while ago." Greg puts the stool away.

6) Peege begins to cough, and Greg's mother stares at her, an uncomfortable expression on her face.

7) As the family leaves, Greg's mother calls back to Peege, "We'll see you next time, Peege."

NOTE: After considering these examples, discuss the following questions:

a) What pattern emerges in all of Greg's mother's responses during the visit? What point is the filmmaker trying to make by creating a character whose reactions are so consistent?

b) Does the film fairly portray the mother's response to Peege and to Peege's situation?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET B

Examine Greg's visit alone with Peege in the context of the earlier visit by the family. In each case below note how Greg's reactions to Peege in his personal visit differ from the reactions of the other family members in their earlier visit.

	FAMILY'S VISIT	GREG ALONE
1) Tone of Voice:		
2) Physical Distance:		
3) Subjects of Conversation:		
4) Listening Skills:		
5) Responses to Peege's Physical Condition:		
6) Touch:		
7) Emotional Responses:		

INTRODUCTION

Often billed as the "sequel" to *Peege*, *Portrait of Grandpa Doc* highlights the experiences of two of the major characters from that earlier film. Greg, who was the oldest son in *Peege*, is now an artist in Los Angeles, and the film begins by showing him preparing for a one-man show of his paintings. He invites his mother to attend the opening of his show, but he refuses to tell her what the dominant theme, or subject, of the exhibition will be. Most of the film traces the progress of Greg's inspiration as he prepares an exhibit of paintings focused on memories of his grandfather, known affectionately by family members as "Grandpa Doc."

When his mother arrives for the opening of the exhibit, she is impressed, and even somewhat shocked, by his comfortable home and pleasant surroundings. But the greater surprise awaits her at the exhibit: she enters the gallery and begins to view each of the paintings in turn. Before long she appears lost in thought, dazed by the memories the paintings stimulate. Greg stands across the room, watching her respond to each of the paintings. One by one she encounters images that recall the past: the great gray beach house, children on the front steps, Grandpa Doc's cabin cruiser, and finally a simple portrait of Grandpa Doc. The beauty of this final image overwhelms her, and Greg leads her out of the gallery. They spend time later talking about their past. Their reminiscences focus on Grandpa Doc's death, and both share memories about their grief they never disclosed to each other before.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask members of your audience if they have seen the film *Peege*. Ask them to recount the basis of the relationship between Greg and his mother in that film. Note the emphasis in *Peege* on the mother's inability to accept the physical losses Peege suffered as well as her fear of her own aging. Prepare viewers of this film by noting that in one sense *Portrait of Grandpa Doc*, as a sequel to *Peege*, attempts to reconcile the conflicts between these two characters by focusing on another intergenerational relationship--that between Grandpa Doc and the young Greg.

2) Grandpa Doc is portrayed in the film as Greg's mentor. What he sees in the young boy Greg is a budding creativity, which he encourages and stimulates by giving the boy opportunities to grow as an artist. Ask members of your audience what they consider to be the most effective ways to stimulate creativity in others. What role does timing play in that mentoring process? What effect does the grandparent-grandchild relationship have on the nurturing of creativity?

3) Another feature of this film is the portrayal of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. Viewers who have seen the film *Death of a Gandy*

Dancer may be interested in comparing the methods of transmitting values that are employed by the grandfather in that film compared to Grandpa Doc. Some of the most interesting scenes in _Portrait of Grandpa Doc_ are the flashbacks we see from the point of view of the young Greg; in these scenes Grandpa Doc watches the young boy closely and directs him unfailingly toward the fulfilment of his creative impulses.

4) As an example of an intergenerational film, _Portrait of Grandpa Doc_ concentrates on the relationship between the grandfather and his young grandson. But as a further complication, the film portrays the middle generation, represented by Greg's mother, as one that is sometimes trapped by narrow expectations of the young. Many scenes illustrate Greg's mother unable to view her child objectively. We see her insisting that Greg act like a boy, that is, fit in with the other children and accept the requisite socialization. But the older generation, free of the close bonds a parent feels for her child, is able to view the grandchild's development as unique and open to limitless possibilities, not restricted to the roles society expects the young to conform to.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. A young artist, Greg, who lives in Los Angeles, recieves a call from his mother in Pennsylvania. She is curious to learn what progress he is making on his upcoming gallery show. He tells her her is still thinking of some ideas for the exhibit. She expresses her concern that he doesn't have much time left to finish the work, but he seems confident. Finally, he makes up an excuse to end the conversation. She asks about the subject of his exhibit, but he refuses to tell her. "It's a surprise."

2. Greg returns to work. Most of the following scenes are flashbacks as Greg searches for inspiration for his paintings. Scenes in the present show him either painting, looking through old pictures, or watching home movies of his mother's father, known affectionately as "Grandpa Doc."

   Most of the flashbacks show examples of Greg's early creativity and imagination and portray Grandap Doc as the one person who recognized in Greg's actions the formative stages of his artistic talent. His mother, on the contrary, is depicted as wanting Greg to be like everyone else. When she sees him "making believe," she complains, "Don't you ever stop pretending?" When he is working on an elaborate sand figure on the beach, she says, "You're too old to be messing around with sand castles." Each time she undercuts Greg's artistic bent, Grandpa Doc is shown immediately praising the boy for his ability.

   The flashbacks show an idyllic world of summers at the beach with Grandpa Doc and his wife. Grandpa Doc's beach house is always packed with happy children, including Greg, and Grandpa Doc is always listening to the children, playing with them, taking them out on his cabin cruiser.

3. Other flashbacks focus on Grandpa Doc's growing relationship with Greg. After he notices Greg's budding artistic talent, he asks the boy to design an insignia for Grandpa Doc's golf club and offers to pay the boy ten dollars for the job. Greg, who is about ten years old, eagerly accepts the challenge, and he dutifully completes the drawing. When Grandpa Doc sees the sketch, he says, "I'm proud of you, boy." Then, to celebrate Greg's first "commission," Grandpa Doc takes Greg to the amusement part so that the boy will remember this occasion.

   Another flashback shows Grandpa Doc formalizing Greg's status as an "artist," when he announces to Greg on front of the boy's mother that he is going to send Greg to art school. "I've been watching you more closely than you think," he says. "I can see in you the seeds of what you can become."

4. Greg's mother arrives in Los Angeles. His father can not come because of work. Greg still won't tell her about the exhibit. When she sees his new home overlooking the Hollywood hills, she says, "It's beautiful." He comments, "I still find this hard to believe--that a few of my paintings paid for this." Inside she admires the view and then says quietly, "If only your grandfather could see you now."

5. They arrive at Greg's gallery show. Mother is nervous and still is kept in suspense. The gallery is packed. Greg is mobbed by well-wishers. he moves around the room, talking to the guests, but keeping an eye on his mother, who begins to admire the paintings--all are scenes from Greg's past, centered on experiences with Grandpa Doc. We see his paintings of the great gray beach house, children on the front steps, Grandpa Doc's big cabin cruiser. Each painting she looks at stimulates a flashback, and we see from her point of view scenes showing Grandpa Doc interacting with the children and his wife. Finally, she arrives at the last painting: a portrait of Grandpa Doc. She stands in front of it, crying. Greg watches her from across the room, then comes up to her and asks if she is ready to leave.

6. The two alone, at a quiet outdoor restaurant. Greg says, "It's hard to believe he's gone." He asks her about the time he sent a poster as a get-well card for Grandpa Doc when he was in the hospital. his mother had never told him about Grandpa Doc's reaction to that gift. She shares the memory now, and we see the scene from the past. Greg's mother says, "He said he had to get better because look what he had to come home to" She recalls his death. "The last thing he did was reach out and squeeze Mother's hand." Greg reaches out and takes his mother's hand and recalls the way he responded to his Grandfather's death. He got in a boat, opened the throttle full, and "then I let go," His mother says, "You never told me that before." Then she says, "We've never talked like this before. I'll bet he's proud of you." They leave the restaurant, singing one of Grandpa Doc's favorite songs.

--1977, Phoenix Films, 28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What was your impression of the relationship between Grandpa Doc and Greg? Did you feel the relationship was believable? What do you think made that relationship unique?

2. Which of the flashbacks had the greatest impact on you? What made that scene special?

3. Could Grandpa Doc be stereotyped in some ways as the "perfect grandfather"?

II. Grandpa Doc as Mentor.

4. What was the basic difference between the way Grandpa Doc and Greg's mother related to Greg in the flashbacks?

5. Why did Grandpa Doc take Greg to the amusement park alone?

6. What were some of the values Grandpa Doc tried to pass on to Greg?

7. What do you think Grandpa Doc meant to Greg?

III. Greg and His Mother.

8. What was your impression of Greg in the opening scene? How would you define the basis of his relationship with his mother as it was portrayed in that scene?

9. Why did Greg want the subject of his art exhibit to be a surprise for his mother?

10. What do you think the paintings in Greg's exhibit meant to his mother? Why was she crying in that scene?

11. Why had Greg's mother never told him about Grandpa Doc's reaction to Greg's poster greeting card he sent to the hospital when Grandpa Doc was ill?

12. How did the action in the film help resolve a conflict between Greg and his mother? Can you define that conflict?

IV. General Questions.

13. Why were so many of the children attracted to Grandpa Doc?

14. Why wasn't Greg's father present in any of the flashbacks? Do you think his presence would have contributed in any way to our understanding of Greg's development?

15. Why did the filmmaker let us see flashbacks from Greg's mother's point of view as she looked at the paintings in Greg's exhibit?

INTRODUCTION

In this brief and simply constructed film, based on a short story by Langston Hughes, we witness the interaction between a young boy, who spends hours alone on the streets, and a plain-spoken older woman, who works the night shift as a nurse at a hospital. The drama of their interaction begins when the young boy tries to snatch her purse as she walks home from work. But Mrs. Louella Baines Washington Jones turns the tables on the ten-year-old when she wrestles him to the ground and then leads him by force back to her apartment in order to deal with his bad behavior. But instead of punishing the boy, she skillfully provides several "lessons" about honesty, the quality of caring for others, forgiveness, humility, and trust.

After feeding the boy a larger-than-ordinary breakfast, she gives him twenty dollars so he can afford to buy the suede shoes he was plotting to purchase after he stole her purse. Her mission accomplished, she sends him back to the street, no strings attached. He stands outside her door, stunned and yet beginning to absorb the lessons he has just experienced. We see him at the end of the film run down the street, jumping for joy at his good fortune.

Although there are only two characters in this simple film, the dynamics of their intergenerational relationship are realistic and believable. The young boy is developed as a character capable of growth, and the older woman is revealed as an unforgettable character whose principles win over the boy.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask members of your audience if they are familiar with the Langston Hughes short story that is the basis of this film. After your audience has viewed the film, you may wish to ask them to compare the short story version to the film version.

2) Tell your audience that this film begins when an older woman is approached on the street by a young juvenile delinquent, who tries to steal her purse. Ask them what they expect will happen, given this scenario. Ask your audience to discuss what effects such petty crimes as purse-snatching have on the victim, especially when the victim is an older person. What are some of the fears older people (especially women) have regarding their being victimized by younger people?

3) Tell your audience that the film provides insights on what "lessons" older people have to offer for the young, especially those young people whose behavior leads to their being labeled as "juvenile delinquents." What values, or principles, do they expect the older person will draw upon when interacting with the younger person in the film?

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Several shots of city streets at dawn. We hear jazz in the background as we watch an older woman leaving the hospital, a coat over her nurse's uniform. She walks across a parking lot, waving at the guard in the gatehouse.

   As she crosses a street corner, a young boy of ten follows her, eyeing her purse. Finally he runs up to her and grabs her purse--but she holds on to the handle, and when he slips and falls, she holds him down. Then she orders him to pick up her purse. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself?" she says. She holds onto him. "If I turn you loose, will you run?" He shakes his head yes. "Then I won't turn you loose." With a determined look in her eye she says, "I've got a great mind to wash your face for you." She asks if he has anyone at home to wash his face, and when he says no, she declares, "Then it's a-going to get washed this morning."

2. She drags him after her. "You ought to be my son. I'd teach you right from wrong." He asks her to let him go, but she insists, "When I let you go, you're going to remember Mrs. Louella Baines Washington Jones." She drags him away, holding his head in an armlock. We see several shots of her, hauling him back to her apartment, accompanied by a lively jazz number.

3. At her apartment Mrs. Jones asks the boy his name. Then she tells Roger to wash his face. He looks down the stairs--his escape route--but decides to go into the kitchen and stand at the sink. Mrs. Jones eyes him warily and then follows him inside. "Are you going to take me to jail?" he asks. "Not with that face. I wouldn't take you nowhere." He tells her no one's home at this time of the morning. She rails on about his trying to snatch her purse. He tells her he wanted to buy a pair of suede shoes. "You could have asked," she says. He looks up in disbelief: "Ma'm?"

4. She leaves the kitchen, and after wiping himself dry he comes into the living room. She recalls when she was young and wanted things she could not get. "I have done things I wouldn't tell you, son." Then she says, "Everybody's got something in common!"

   She goes into the kitchen to make breakfast. He stares at her purse on the sofa, but he doesn't look inside. He asks if he can run an errand for her, perhaps go to the store, but she says she needs nothing.

5. Soon her table is filled with plates, silverware, and hot dishes. He eats heartily, and she says, "You're not used to eating your meals at this hour. More than likely your Momma fixes you a good meal at night so you can get to bed when you're supposed to." She tells him she works the night shift at the hospital. "I get to talk to a lot of interesting people there." Then she notes, "Sick people need help at all hours."

6. Later she feeds him dessert. He wipes his mouth carefully on a napkin. She goes to her purse and hands him a twenty dollar bill for a pair of

suede shoes. "And don't ever make the mistake of latching onto my pocketbook or nobody else's!" One last word: "Behave yourself!" He sits at the table, stunned, counting the dollar bills over and over.

7. He is ready to leave. He stands at the landing, holding his money. She says goodbye and adds another "Behave yourself, boy." She closes the door. He looks back and says softly, "Thank you, Ma'm."

Outside, the boy pockets his twenty dollars, looks down at his dirty sneakers, and starts down the sidewalk, jumping high in the air and then walking at a normal pace down the street.

--1976, Phoenix Films, 13 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What was your impression of Mrs. Louella Baines Washington Jones? What makes her a unique character? What was unexpected, and even unique, about the methods she employed?

2. What was your impression of Roger when you saw him for the first time, hiding behind some garbage cans on the street? Can you recall seeing the boy on the street again in the last scene in the film? What was different about him in that last scene? What was different about your response to his character at the end of the film?

3. Did you find the interaction between Mrs. Jones and Roger to be believable? Did you have sufficient information about the characters to judge their interaction?

II. Mrs. Louella Baines Washington Jones.

4. What do you think are some of the contributing factors to Mrs. Jones' character and values?

5. What are some of the principles this woman lives by?

6. Why did Mrs. Jones take Roger home with her and feed him breakfast? Why did she make such a large meal, considering that the meal was breakfast?

7. What did the appearance of her apartment, including its furnishings, reveal about Mrs. Jones' character? In what ways did the appearance of her apartment contrast to the surroundings of her neighborhood?

III. Roger's Lessons.

8. When Roger tells her he tried to steal her purse so he could buy a pair of suede shoes, Mrs. Jones says, "You could have asked!" He looks at her in disbelief and says, "Ma'm?" Why was he so surprised at her remark? What "lesson" is she hinting at in this scene?

9. At one point Mrs. Jones tells Roger, "Everybody's got something in common!" What does she mean by this remark?

10. Why does Mrs. Jones give Roger twenty dollars? Do you think it was a good idea to give him the money?

11. When Roger is ready to leave, why does he wait until Mrs. Jones has closed the door before saying, "Thank you, Ma'm"? In the context of the overall film, what do you think he means by those words?

IV. General Questions.

12. What was the basis of Mrs. Jones' reaction to Roger when he first tried to grab her purse?

13. When Mrs. Jones dragged Roger home with him, we saw him standing at the top of the stairs, looking down at his escape route. Why didn't he try to run away at that moment?

14. When Roger enters Mrs. Jones' house, how did his behavior begin to change? Can you recall what started that behavior change? Can you recall examples in later scenes that show Roger responding to this new environment?

15. Why does Roger ask Mrs. Jones if he can run an errand for her in scene 4?

16. At dinner Mrs. Jones tells Roger, "More than likely your Momma fixes you a good meal at night so you can get to be when you're supposed to." Do you think she believes that is the case? Then why does she say it?

RECOMMENDED AUDIENCES:

NAME OF FILM:	pre-school	elementary	junior high	senior high	college	adults	older adults
Close Harmony	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Death of - Gandy Dancer			x	x	x	x	x
Home to Stay			x	x	x	x	x
Hundred Penny Box		x	x	x	x	x	x
One More Winter				x	x	x	x
Peege			x	x	x	x	x
Portrait- Grandpa Doc		x	x	x	x	x	x
Thank You, Ma'm		x	x	x	x	x	x

SUBJECT AREAS	Close Harmony	Death of a Gandy Dancer	Home to Stay	Hundred Penny Box	One More Winter	Peege	Portrait of Grandpa Doc	Thank You, Ma'm
ageism: dispel myths	x				x	x		x
arts/crafts/music	x			x			x	
counseling/psychology		x		x		x		x
creativity and aging	x	x				x	x	
cultural diversity				x	x			
death/grief education		x	x			x		
ethical issues		x	x			x		x
family relationships		x	x	x		x	x	
film study/ film art	x	x		x	x	x		
housing concerns			x	x		x		
life review	x	x		x		x		
loneliness of old age	x			x	x	x		
long-term health care		x	x	x		x		
men's roles		x	x		x	x	x	
mental health prog.	x			x				x
minorities and aging				x				x
oral history		x		x				
physical disability		x	x			x		
religious education	x	x		x		x		
rural aging		x	x	x				
stereotypes of aging			x		x	x	x	
urban aging	x							x
women's roles	x	x		x	x	x		x

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED FILMS

Annie and the Old One
Phoenix Films / BFA Educational Media, 1975, 15 min.

This simple tale recounts a young Navajo girl's attempts to deny the reality of death in her life. As the narrator of the film says, "Annie's Navajo world was good." Her day is made up of school and chores, or watching her mother weave a Navajo rug to sell in the town, but "best of all were the evenings," when Annie could sit with her garndmother and enjoy listening to stories from the past. When her grandmother, the "old one," announces to the family one day that she will die after the mother completes weaving the rug that is now on her loom, Annie is devastated. Even though her grandmother gives Annie her weaving stick as a last gift, so that Annie's mother will be able to teach her how to weave, Annie stubbornly refuses to accept this gift. She only can think of the rug on her mother's loom, for when it is finished the old one will die.

Refusing to accept the inevitable, Annie begins to commit acts of mischief in order to divert her mother from completing the task. But each time Annie's plans fail, and finally she resorts to ripping out several strands of wool from the rug each night--until her grandmother finds her by the loom one night. Instead of punishing her, she takes the girl out into the hills and teaches her a lesson for life: no one can stop time or the effects of time, and each person must learn to accept her death just as she is given life. The next day Annie asks her mother to teach her how to weave, and when she slips her weaving stick into the loom--as her mother had done as a child and as her grandmother had done as a child before her--we see that Annie has learned to apply her grandmother's lesson to her own life.

Although this film is often simplistic in its characterizations and in dialogue, its straightforward story conveys a powerful message, appealing especially to younger audiences (elementary to junior high). Here the Indian way of relating the individual to past and future generations underscores the importance of what the very young can learn from the old ones in their family. The film would be an effective tool for helping young children learn a new perspective on death, as it is expressed by another culture.

Bloomers
Perspective Films, 1980, 28 min.

The daughter in this film confronts an unresolved relationship with her mother. After not seeing her mother for about a year, Sippy, a successful artist, arrives in Miami to visit her mother, who recently has been hospitalized. Before we see their reunion, however, the filmmaker suggests that Sippy's relationship with her husband is another source of conflict in her life. Faced with this dual set of tensions, Sippy hopes to overwhelm her mother with love and affection, and this response is underscored by a comment from an elderly resident who reminds Sippy, "You've only got one mother--you've got to learn how to care for her."

But upon her arrival, Sippy is shocked at her mother's unkempt appearance and poor nutritional habits. "I want to do something for you!" Sippy insists, but she employs all the wrong tactics, alienating her mother even further. Despite Sippy's protestations, her mother seems concerned primarily with the status of her daughter's marriage. When Sippy reminds her that she had her own art exhibit, her mother snaps, "You ought to have your own baby." Repeatedly she warns her that she needs to pay more attention to her husband. Finally, the two engage in a shoving match over some of the mother's dirty clothes (Sippy wants to do her laundry for her), and their physical struggle culminates in an emotional release on the part of the mother, who remembers when she was a young girl and refused to wash her mother's bloomers. Recalling the pain of this episode, she cries, "How could I know the next day I would never see her again!" Realizing the extent of this painful recollection, Sippy comforts her, and the two reestablish the boundaries of their own relationship. "You're such a beautiful person," Sippy tells her mother, and the film ends with the young woman calling her husband long-distance, acknowledging the importance of sustaining her relationship with her husband, too.

This film has an important story to tell, one that many women can identify with easily as they consider their relationships with their mothers or grandmothers, but the intensity of the drama is undermined by the superficial characterizations of Sippy and her mother. The two main characters are "representative" of many mothers and daughters, and the conflicts they face are very real, but the film needed to address their interaction more subtly in order to make their characterizations and the outcome of their interaction more convincing. Still the film will be useful for adult audiences interested in the following areas of concern: women's studies, ethnic relationships (the main characters are Jewish), traditional family relationships, and retirement and housing problems of surviving spouses.

Chillysmith Farm

Filmmakers Library, 1981, 55 min.

For those readers of Mark and Dan Jury's book Gramp (1976), an expressive chronicle of the physical decline and eventual death of their grandfather, and the family's decision to care for him at home rather than institutionalize him, this film would appear to be the long-awaited sequel. The authors captured their story in Gramp using photographs and a brief narrative supporting those images. An their grandfather's senility worsened, he began to envision imaginary characters, some of which he called Michigans and Chillysmiths. So the writers turned filmmakers incorporated one of the images into this production. Whereas the book succeeded in communicating a unique intergenerational relationship, the film is less effective because it repeats many of the images already published in the book and focuses on two sets of relationships that are less compelling than the original story of their involvement with Gramp.

The first half of the film recapitulates much of the same material readers encountered in the book, even including many of the pictures that were so moving in the printed context. After recalling Gramp's death, the filmmakers turn to concerns of the younger generation and deal with the possible effects of the experience on one of the grandchildren. Then they recount the physical decline and eventual death of Nan, who was Gramp's wife. After suffering several strokes, and spending time in the hospital, the family brings her home to die. Nan dies quietly. As one character says, "With Nan it was so peaceful." The third part of the film depicts the birth of one of the Jury children at home, and after some discussion, the family decides to allow the other young children to be present in the room during the birth. Although these last two parts of the film are presented competently, the stories of Nan's death and the birth of a member of a new generation lack the timeliness and complexity of the original story. Of course, if viewers have not read the book version, they may be moved deeply by some of the images incorporated in the film, particularly those in the first half of the film. But viewers familiar with the book may be disappointed by the lack of new material, the filmmaker's tendency to rely heavily on still photographs, and the absence of the unique intergenerational relationships that made Gramp's story so memorable.

Generations

Phoenix Films, 1979, 11 min.

In a film that uses no dialogue, the filmmaker tells the story of an older man and a young boy who meet in the park one day and bridge the generation gap. When an older couple enter the park and sit under a tree together, she to knit and he to read for a few hours, the filmmaker focuses on the older man's point of view. As he watches the children play on swings, he remembers a time when he was a boy and played on swings, too. A moment later we see the old man on one of the swings and soon he is swinging high in the air as if to recapture the feelings of his youth. One of the children next to him, a young boy, is stunned by this turn of events and he begins to swing too, moving in concert with the older man. But when the older man slows down and eventually stops the swing, the young boy stops swinging too and takes his turn at leading the older man in play. He runs to the slide and climbs to the top, and the older man does likewise. After enjoying that ride, the boy jumps on a spin-around, and the older man follows him. They whirl around together on the ride for a few moments. Then the young boy returns to the swing, and as he flies higher and higher into the air, driven by the energy of his youth, the older man stands nearby, watching him closely. But when the boy jumps off the swing at the high point of its arc, landing on his feet in front of the swingset, the older man shrugs his shoulders, returns to the tree, and sits next to his wife again. At first, the young boy appears disappointed that his challenge was left unanswered, but when he sees the older man lean toward his wife and kiss her affectionately, he smiles for the first time.

Now the older couple interact with the young boy in a new context. The wife invites the boy to join them for sandwiches, and after their meal, the wife returns to her knitting while her husband and the boy go for a walk together. Several poignant scenes follow, showing the two interacting warmly. When they return from their walk, the older woman displays her completed knitting, a true work of art, and her husband draws a beautiful pencil sketch of the young boy.

When he shows his work of art to his new-found friend, the young boy smiles proudly.

The film offers an excellent combination of images and musical interludes, and the relationships depicted are poignant and sometimes thought-provoking. However, the central idea of the film--that members of different generations need each other in order to become complete and well-integrated individuals--is portrayed unrealistically and even stereotypically. The older couple, for instance, are storybook-like grandparent figures, and the young boy is the typically alienated individual who lacks any contact with the older generation. The emphasis on the "artistic" qualities of the older couple interferes with development of their idiosyncracies of character. The older couple are too "perfect," and the relationship between the couple and the young boy lacks any narrative tension. The most compelling part of the film is the earlier interaction between the older man and the young boy (their playing together on the swingset, slide, and spin-around). That part of the film offers some subtle touches regarding the way the differing points of view of the generations make it more difficult to bridge the generation gap.

Mandy's Grandmother

Phoenix Films, 1978, 30 min.

Mandy is a ten-year-old tomboy, who wears jeans, loves horses, and has a pet toad. When she learns that her grandmother from England is coming to visit the family, she tries to prepare for the upcoming visit. She goes to the library and asks, "Where's the grandmother section?" All of the books she finds reinforce the stereotypical views of grandmothers: they are kindly, gray-haired ladies who wear their hair up in a bun and hold children in their laps in rocking chairs. But a surprise is in store for Mandy, for her grandmother is an attractive, vivacious woman who still is in the prime of her life. Despite her status as a "modern" woman, however, Mandy's grandmother is burdened with some stereotypes of her own--she expects "Amanda" to act like a proper little girl, not like a tomboy, and she errs in thinking Amanda is fond of dolls more than horses. When she tries to establish their relationship based on her perceptions of what little girls should be like, however, a serious conflict arises, and both are disappointed.

After ignoring each other for some time, eventually the two confront each other in a dramatic scene. Mandy finds her grandmother alone in her room, sitting in a rocking chair, on the verge of tears. The older woman shares her feelings with Mandy openly, revealing some of her fears and insecurity. These reminiscences touch Mandy, and--like a scene out of one of the picture books Mandy found in the library--she climbs into her grandmother's lap and hugs her tight. Their conflicts resolved, the two forge a meaningful grandmother-granddaughter relationship. Now Mandy's grandmother pays attention to things Mandy is interested in: her horse, her pet toad, the run-down boat she plays with. Their shared experiences unite them, and when her grandmother prepares to leave for England, Mandy doesn't want her to go. But both agree that their friendship and love will sustain them.

In its crisp photography and editing the film has the texture of Peege and Portrait of Grandpa Doc. One of the aims of the film is to help younger audiences relate to the intergenerational conflicts portrayed, and the message for older people apparently is that they need to approach the younger generation not with their image of what little girls and boys are made of, based on what children were like in their own childhood, but with an open mind to the values of individuality and openness the young now possess. The film leaves viewers with a happy feeling about how well children and older people can relate to one another. To some extent, the early section of the film is somewhat contrived in its characterization of Mandy's grandmother as a bubbly Nanny with old-fashioned values, and perhaps the resolution of their conflict is too easy and almost idealistic. Still, the portrayal of their growing friendship is effective and heartwarming, and younger viewers will be able to identify with Mandy's character and values.

The Shopping Bag Lady

Learning Corporation of America, 1975, 25 min.

This film compares the reactions of two teenaged girls to one of New York City's shopping bag ladies, who lives beneath a bridge in Central Park in a cardboard-box shelter. Emily is the more sensitive of the two girls, but because of the peer pressure exerted by her girl friend, she joins in taunting the older woman. After one of their encounters, however, the shopping bag lady finds a puppet Emily dropped and left behind. The next day Emily returns to the park, sees the old woman with her puppet, and takes it from her, even though she sees the old woman treating the inanimate object as if it were a child. That night we see a brief scene of Emily in bed at home, unable to sleep because her grandmother, who is sleeping in the bed next to hers, is snoring. Emily responds with disgust to her grandmother in this scene, as if to reinforce her negative attitude toward older people.

Later we see Emily, her girl friend, and her friend's little brother riding the merry-go-round in the park. The shopping bag lady, standing behind the metal grating of a fence, watches them and the other children enjoying the fun. When Emily's friend notices the older woman talking to her brother, who has strayed some distance from the girls (in order to show the older woman his "horsie"), she screams for a policeman and accuses the old woman of trying to kidnap her brother. No one speaks on behalf of the shopping bag lady--not even Emily, who knew the woman was doing no wrong. After the policeman takes the older woman away, Emily stays behind and retrieves her shopping bags.

That night Emily is drawn to look inside one of the bags and begins to sift through its contents. She finds an old photograph album of the shopping bag lady's family. In this well-conceived and poignant scene Emily discovers that Annie, the shopping bag lady, had a youth of her own. She is especially touched by one picture of Annie at the age of fourteen--Emily's own age. She stands at her mirror and holds Annie's picture up to compare it with her own image.

The next day she talks to the policeman who took Annie away. Learning that Annie has been taken to the hospital, not to a jail, she visits the older woman, bringing her shopping bags--and the puppet she once took away from her. She leaves with a greater sense of understanding this woman as a person, and the next time we see her, she encounters her own grandmother, sitting in the park, reading a modern novel. Emily initiates a conversation, and the two walk away together, interested in learning more about each other.

This film is directed at a junior or senior high school audience. Its examination of the insensitivity of youth toward older people and the influence of peer pressure is somewhat contrived, but central to the film's meaning. The most effective scene in the film is Emily's private and personal discovery that Annie was once a young woman just like her. That this discovery has a positive effect on her relationship with her grandmother shows how much Emily has learned. The value of identifying with other people, rather than demeaning them through inappopriate stereotypes, is a significant message in this film.

Sunshine's On the Way

Learning Corporation of America, 1981, 30 min.

Delightful and vivid characterizations highlight this upbeat film about talented older people who enrich their lives in a small-town nursing home. Bubba June, one of the aides in the nursing home, has a long-time love affair with trombone playing, and she often practices by listening to records of her hero, T. P. Jackson, a famous black trombonist. Her mother, who operates a beauty salon on the first floor of their house, doesn't share Bubba June's dream, and she wants her daughter to start acting like a young woman.

As part of her work at the nursing home, Bubba June has formed a dixieland jazz band with some of the residents, and they rehearse several times each week. One day she meets a new resident, a man who recently suffered a stroke and lost the use of his right arm. The new resident turns out to be T. P. Jackson. Bubba June greets him with admiration, saying, "I've got your albums!" He snaps, "Now you got me!" Before long Bubba June realizes that T. P. believes his life is over just because he can not play his trombone with his right arm. Determined to help him recover from the doldrums, and anxious to have T. P. help her band to improve their playing, she keeps after him, cajoling him for his lack of motivation. Finally, she convinces him to help the nursing home residents fine tune their jazz playing, and she solves his physical problem by devising a backpack frame that will hold his trombone in place so that he can manipulate the slide with his left arm. T. P. is impressed and appreciates her efforts. Soon the band is playing smoothly, and--because one of the members knows Doc Severinson from Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show*, they are invited to Hollywood to perform on national television.

Unfortunately, this plot contrivance overwhelms any further attention to character development or to the relationship between Bubba June and T. P. The rest of the film follows the dictates of stock melodrama: the group overcomes the chief nurse's reluctance to allow them to travel to Hollywood; Bubba June convinces her mother to let her accompany the group; Bubba June spends her life's savings to rent a limousine so that the group can be driven to the airport "in style"; T. P. dies the night before the performance; but Bubba June picks up his horn and performs with the group the next evening.

Like other films that focus on intergenerational relationships, *Sunshine's On the Way* is aimed at younger audiences (junior high to high school). Films like *A Special Trade*, *A Home Run for Love*, and *The Rocking Chair Rebellion* tend to stereotype portrayals of older people, sometimes sugar-coating the interactions so much that the individuality of characters is lost completely. Although Sunshine's On the Way shares those characteristics with the films noted above, it offers more realistic characterizations that stand out, despite the weaknesses of an unrealistic plot, and offer viewers individual older people they can relate to and identify with.

The Violin

Learning Corporation of America, 1973, 24 min.

This film depicts a special relationship between a solitary old man, a violinist, who lives alone in a cottage in the country, and two young boys, who are disappointed when they purchase an old violin, only to discover that they make more noise than music with it. The filmmaker "tells" the story by incorporating the comments of the old man as narrator, recalling his interaction with the two boys. We see the two boys enter a pawnshop and present the shopkeeper with a jar filled with coins. Attracted to a beautiful violin in the shop window, they intend to purchase it with their life's savings. But the shopkeeper is willing only to sell them a battered old instrument he keeps in the back. As the boys leave the shop, the narrator laments, "When we were children there was nothing more depressing than a sensible, realistic compromise."

When the older boy is unable to coax any music out of the instrument, he goes to a park, followed by his younger brother, and discards the violin, frustrated with his inability to realize a dream. When they leave, the old man comes along, retrieves it, and brings it back to musical life. The boys, who are playing nearby, are mystified at hearing the melody. As they approach the old man, we hear the narrator's poetic words, commenting on his ill fate and present situation: "The sudden hush of an audience, the bright world of music, and then the changing values, things gone wrong, a long journey, perhaps predestined to give back the boy his love for the violin."

The old man packs the violin away and leaves the bench, two bewildered children in close pursuit. At his remote cabin the children peek through the window and gaze at a strange world of antiques crowded inside. "Children have the quality of seeing right through the masks given to us by time. They can see us as the children we once were ourselves." Soon the older man is tutoring the older boy, who learns quickly. Time passes, and after several pleasant interludes, we see the teacher and his pupil playing a duet together. The young violinist now has his violin back again and he plays in earnest.

Soon the older man decides to leave. As he pens a farewell note, we hear him say, "When the boys grew older, they would understand how difficult it was for an old man to part with his friends." Then we see the two boys fishing on a small bridge. As they leave, the older boy trips and falls hard onto the violin case, breaking his precious instrument beyond repair. The younger boy dashes away to find the old man and ask for help. At that point the narrator neatly sums up the meaning of the film: "I offered him my violin. It wasn't an easy decision. A gift for music is only the begining. There were hard years of discipline ahead. I knew he could turn his back on music forever." He leaves the violin near the older boy, who is despondent, and unable to respond to this gracious gesture. Then the older man prepares for his journey, departing in a small rowboat. But before he is out of sight of the two boys, the older boy finally recovers his senses, picks up the violin, and begins to play for his master, his mentor, and his friend.

As in the case of so many other films about intergenerational relationships, The Violin stereotypes its portrayal of an aging character and telegraphs most of its ideas so that nothing is left to the imagination. But the film is distinguished by its beautiful images and excellent use of editing and music. If its characters never are fully realized as individuals, the types they represent offer many amusing and touching moments. The film is aimed at younger audiences, primarily elementary to junior high ages.

THE GREAT CIRCLE OF LIFE:

A Resource Guide

to

Humanistic Films on Aging

CHAPTER FOUR -- RESPONSES TO LOSS

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter a variety of individuals respond to a diverse set of losses. In each film one character's response to loss affects not only himself or herself; all others that person interacts with are affected in complex, unpredictable ways. The dynamics of grief extend outward from the individual, and ultimately each person must resolve his or her fears alone. Death plays a major role in most of these films. The dominant source of loss is the death of a spouse, the death of a member of a family, the death of a member of the community, or--in the case of the two non-fiction films in this chapter--the impending death of the person being filmed. Other losses highlighted in this chapter are more abstract: characters respond to the loss of their self-respect, the loss of their role in the family or their role in society, and the loss of their courage to survive in a complex and ambiguous world.

Several films portray the effects of grief caused by death, sometimes on the individual, and other times on the community as a whole. Grieving: Suddenly Alone charts the main character's progression from a grief-stricken widow to a woman who has the capacity to establish relationships based on her new identity. The main character, Katie, experiences all five classical stages of grief--denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance--but her responses suggest as well the circularity of grief, where from moment to moment the individual may swing from depression to acceptance and back to depression. In Piece of Cake the main character's bizarre actions are understandable when viewers discover that although his daughter died several years earlier, he still can not accept her death. His denial of this loss leads him to spin a wild yarn about her plans to return home for a Christmas dinner. Finally, after playing along with him for some time, a close friend confronts him with the truth of his daughter's death in order to help him overcome his grief. Such long-term effects of grief also are the subject of the one animated film in this chapter, Martin the Cobbler, based on a Leo Tolstoy short story. Despite an interval or thirty or forty years, the main character in this film still grieves over the loss of his wife, who died in childbirth, and the loss of his son, who died while still a boy. Now his grief has hardened into a grudge against God, whom he blames for the losses. But Martin regains his emotional balance through a series of simple encounters with people from his communty and through a remarkable vision that teaches him that--as in the original title of the Tolstoy story--"where love is, God is." The effects of grief on an entire community are depicted in The Parting, a somber film that recreates the elaborate ritual associated with the death of a member of the community. The film captures the essence of the community's response to grief by recreating the sights and sounds of that ritual.

Two non-fiction films in this chapter are self-contained segments from a feature-length documentary, Dying, filmed by a Public Television Station. The two films offer contrasting responses to a similar topic--the effects of terminal cancer on the dying individual or on that person's family. In Sally the main character appears to have overcome her fear of dying. Despite the ravages of brain cancer, she responds philosophically to her suffering, and her active sense of humor helps relieve some of the pain and loss of mobility she experiences. Sally's response to dying is straightforward, not sentimental; and her acceptance of her death will inspire viewers. In contrast, the experiences of Harriet and Bill are unpleasant and even depressing. Bill has a terminal cancer, but he is dying alone. His wife, Harriet, can not talk to him openly about the disease, and she is dominated by the fear that she will be unable to cope with their two young boys after Bill's death. She feels trapped; and she expresses her anger by crying out, "I refuse to be left with two teen-aged boys!" when she talks to Bill's physician. At another point in the film, while seeking counsel from someone else, she shares her frustration at not being able to cope with Bill's dying by asking, "If he's got to go, why can't it be quick and get it over with?" The film ends without resolution or acceptance for either Harriet or Bill.

The other films in this chapter portray responses to losses other than death, although death sometimes plays a role indirectly in the character's emotional and psychological state of mind. The main character in The Mailbox is a widow who has lived in the foothills of Utah for many years in the house her husband built. Lethe is a lonely woman, and at one point she chastises her husband for leaving her a widow in this desolate place. But for the most part Lethe struggles against her loneliness and emphasizes her role as a caregiver to family and to friends. In fact, Lethe is portrayed as a loving grandmother figure whose role in her family has gone unappreciated. The film makes its point strongly: older people like Lethe have a great deal to offer to families, and their capacity for love and emotional support should not be ignored.

Three films in the chapter emphasize responses to losses that confront characters with difficult struggles to survive in society by making new friends, reestablishing their sense of self-esteem or self-respect, and forging a strong identity to carry them forward. The first film, For Gentlemen Only, is a humorous story of two older friends who live in a single-room-occupancy hotel in a large city. Jim, a widower, responds bitterly to a loss of what he considers his self-respect when he discovers that the hotel will now provide rooms for women. In his mind, the hotel is "For Gentlemen Only," and any change will ruin the hotel's reputation and reduce his personal sense of well-being. Coupled with this loss of self-respect, Jim feels that he is losing his "place" in society. But Jim begins to overcome his bitterness and depression at the end of the film, when his faithful friend, Hughie, helps him commit a childish prank that restores a measure of the men's dignity.

Another example of a man who loses his place in society is the main character in One-Eyed Men Are Kings, the second film by Edmond Sechan highlighted in the text. Here the main character is a lonely man who never finds an appropriate means to regain his sense of self-esteem or identity. Unlike the character in Sechan's String-Bean, this character is dominated by his environment, and he fails to find fulfilment by devoting himself to something or someone else. Instead, he finds companionship by practicing a deception that insures the prompt reward of many new-found friendships. But once his deception is exposed, he lacks the courage to reestablish his former friendships, and at the end of the film he appears a desolate figure, forlorn and alone.

A third instance of an individual's failure to resolve his place in society is the character Karl in A Private Life. Karl fled from Nazi Germany before World War II in order to escape persecution. But he left his wife and family behind, because they faced no danger. Now more than forty years have passed, and Karl is haunted by his memory of the past. He is busy writing his memoirs, and he spends a great deal of time with Margot, another older person who lives alone in New York City. Their relationship appears to be a platonic one; Margot provides a meal, and Karl reads to her from his memoirs. But Margot seeks a more intimate relationship, and we see her suffer the loss of her dream when Karl fails to recognize or acknowledge her emotional needs. He drifts away from her, having lost his place in society, while Margot stays behind--determined to make her way through the complex fabric of New York City society. When Margot's supervisor takes her off of an important account at work, she suffers a loss of self-esteem and gains an insight into our society's tendency to stereotype the elderly as incapable of keeping up with younger workers. She muses at one point in the film, the city "can knock you down. It has knocked me down a few times." Unlike Karl, Margot has the courage to struggle on and to survive.

INTRODUCTION

General Introduction to DYING

Dying was a project completed in 1976 for WGBH-TV, the Public Television Station in Boston, Massachusetts, by filmmaker Michael Roemer. This 97-minute non-fiction film featured the stories of four people in the Boston area who died from some form of cancer. The film begins with a 12-minute portrait of Sandy, whose husband, Mark, died two years ago at the age of 29. Sandy narrates her story simply and effectively, and this section becomes part of the prologue to the stories of Sally, Harriet and Bill, and Reverend Bryant. Sandy notes that when Mark went to the hospital, "No one would tell us what was wrong with him." After they waited through lab tests, she learned from a friend that Mark had cancer. She confronted the doctor and asked him how much time was left. "Five months was like a gift to me. Maybe we would see Spring together." Her conflict: should she tell Mark? "A friend said to me, 'It's your covenant.' Then I knew what I was going to do." She decided to tell him. "I wanted to draw strength from him, and I knew that I would be able to do that."

Sandy recounts her telling Mark that he had cancer. "And then he wept, and he said, 'And you had to carry that all alone.'" Mark told the doctor, "If I have only three days to live, I want to know about it, so I don't waste those days." Friends visited, and they "told Mark they loved him." We see a picture of Mark, Sandy and one of their daughters.

The camera returns to Sandy. After five months Mark left the hospital, his condition deteriorating. But to Sandy, "It was a good period. We did lots of sharing." When his condition declined further, he was returned to the hospital, where Sandy recalls, "I was shoved back into a corner of his room, and I really resented the medical world taking away my role." She describes the awful scene. "I no longer had anything to do." Then she adds, "I'm grateful now for the extra day the medical world gave us." She recalls that a friend agreed to sneak their baby daughter into the hospital "so I could nurse her by Mark's bedside. That gave us a sense of the continuum of life." At the end, Mark asked to have all of the artificial life supports removed. "Our doctor honored Mark's request to die with dignity. In a strange way it was a good day. . . . I gave him his last bath. . .he sang songs. . .he said, 'Bring the party in here. Where's everybody?'" The group shared brownies. She says, "There was a real breaking of bread, with brownies and ginger ale." Later, he kissed Sandy and said, Let's call it quits, Pooh."

We see Sandy kneading bread in her kitchen, while her daughter stands nearby, kneading her own miniature loaf. Then we see Sandy and her two daughters eating at a picnic. Back home, Sandy puts her little girl to bed. After she goes out, the little girl, restless, lies in her crib, kicking her leg up and down in the dark.

A second prologue to the film, five minutes long, features Maynard Mack, a humanist from Yale University, who served as consultant for the film. He notes that the film's objective, as originally conceived, was to "bring the business of dying out of the deep freeze of silence and up into the living room, where it can be talked about." The filmmakers wanted the audience to respond with their hearts, as well as with their minds. The film was to draw on all of the resources of the humanities. A three-part structure was planned, with a prologue and an epilogue, then a long middle part focusing on the individual's response to dying. The aim, it was hoped, would be "an insight into dying as it was felt by the dying person." The first and third sections would present a historical interpretation of dying, utilizing the resources of the humanities. But when the long middle part was finished, and Mack viewed it, he realized "there could be no prologue or epilogue to that film." He recalled a scene from King Lear, where the king, upon meeting a beggar in the country, compared the artificial finery of his clothes to the beggar's rags. Lear said, referring to himself and his three retainers, "Here's three who are sophisticated, but thou art the thing itself."

Mack says, "I realized then that the 'thing itself' was the experience of the suffering human beings I had just seen." Then he adds, "As the filming progressed, they thought often of you, you who would see them in their weakness as well as their strength, you who might judge them harshly, not realizing what courage it takes to face death steadily and how even sometimes the highest courage fails." He sums up their stories: "Tell them that though this comes on film it is not fiction, but truth. Tell them to try to see how precious what they have is. Tell them to try and think how they would behave in my place, for someday they will be in my place."

INTRODUCTION: SALLY / HARRIET AND BILL

I recommend viewing the two sections of Dying, "Sally" and "Harriet and Bill," together because they offer contrasting views of the effects of terminal illness on individuals and their families. The two films are a painful comparison in many ways, since the courage and acceptance displayed by Sally appears to be lacking in the stoicism and avoidance characterizing Harriet and Bill's narrative. Perhaps their stories represent opposite ends of a continuum of the individual's responses to loss; Sally tends to acknowledge her disease almost as if it were a companion, while Harriet and Bill tend to deny Bill's melanoma throughout the course of the disease. Although both films share the dying person's point of view, Sally often speaks directly to the viewer, comfortably sharing her feelings and commenting on the action, whereas Bill never addresses the viewer and seems constrained by the events that are taking place around him. Both films certainly have the power to stimulate response on the part of viewers, and both films invite viewers to confront their own feelings about dying.

The first of three people featured in these personal accounts is Sally, an irrepressible woman who refuses to submit to the ravages of her disease. Sally's story is an inspiring one, not because she attempts to inspire, but because her straightforward and unassuming manner and generous spirit speak for themselves, offering encouragement to anyone who will view her story. Ironies abound in Sally's story: she is a 44-year-old woman who looks much older because of the effects of the cancer. She recalls, "Before I was sick I was a big healthy redhead, climbing mountains all over." At the end of the film we see her return home from the hospital to be cared for by her mother, a woman in her seventies. At one point in the film she muses, "I would like to go into coma and just drift along and then die." Sally gets her wish, dying at home after being in a coma for nearly six months.

Although Bill is the second person dying of cancer featured in Dying, his story is bound closely to that of his wife, Harriet. Bill's point of view is muted in this narrative; unlike Sally, he is an introspective individual who tends to face inward upon himself rather than outward toward the public. Harriet's is the dominant point of view in the film. Viewers notice quickly that the depth of Harriet's response to Bill's cancer is characterized by passionate, uncompromising anger. Harriet feels cheated by this disease, and she makes her case known to Bill, to her children, to a family friend or counselor, and to Bill's physician. But no one can resolve the conflict she faces; Bill has a terminal illness that will run its course in time. In the meantime, Harriet's fate is to feel trapped and cut off from her future.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) You may want to ask viewers if they are familiar with other films that focus on personal accounts of dying people. Some examples: How Could I Not Be Among You?, Though I Walk Through the Valley, The Final Proud Days of Elsie Wurster, and Chillysmith Farm (see Additional Recommended Films at the end of this chapter). Ask your viewers to share what characteristics these films have in common. What are some of the objectives of this type of film? Note that Sally and Harriet and Bill offer personal accounts of dying that attempt to recreate the texture of the experience by integrating the individual's idiosyncracies of character into the ongoing narrative.

2) All of the segments of the film Dying depict people dying from cancer. Your audience may want to discuss some of their attitudes toward cancer as a terminal illness. What are some of the reasons people fear the disease of cancer? Suggest that your audience keep in mind society's fear of cancer while viewing the experiences of Sally as well as Harriet and Bill, particularly to compare the responses of Sally and Bill to their terminal illness.

3) Depending on the nature of your audience, consider asking viewers to share their feelings on these questions:

   - What insights about their own experiences do viewers think they can gain by watching these films?
   - What do viewers think the subjects of these films gain by allowing themselves to be photographed and permitting the filmmaker to portray scenes from their lives in the films?
   - What insights on improving health-care for terminally ill patients can be gained by exhibiting these films?

- -- What do viewers expect will be the most unpleasant aspects of these films? What are viewers most afraid of seeing? Why?
- -- Have any of your viewers personally experienced the death of a spouse or family member? If the death was due to cancer, what impact--if any--did that disease have on the individual's or family's response to the experience?

SALLY: SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Sally is lying in a hospital bed, her head shaved, one of the lenses of her glasses darkened. Looking into the camera, she says, "I have cancer of the brain. It grows just like moss. There's nothing that can be done. All you have to do is wait."

2. Two nurses are fitting a leg brace on Sally, while she offers encouragement. "I see it movin'," she declares, as the nurses continue their work. "Am I pushing right? Hurry up, before I have a spasm and the thing pops out." The nurses fit a sling around her arm and lift a strap over her neck. As the camera changes to a closeup of Sally, working on the sling, we can see a depression on the right side of her head, where part of her skull was removed for an operation. "I do it day after day!" she says, snapping her right arm for emphasis. Finally the sling is ready.

3. Later, lying in bed in a medium closeup, Sally says, "Before I was sick I was a big healthy redhead, climbing mountains all over... just havin' a nice time. And then: down, down, down."

4. Sally slowly climbing a stairway, helped by a physical therapist. She struggles up one stair at a time, her leg fitted with the brace.

   Then we see her exercising in the physical therapy room, walking a track between two parallel bars toward the therapist, who offers encouragement. We see an older man on an adjacent track in the foreground, bent over, holding onto the bars. Sally turns around to start back down the track. "Right along the white line!" she crows. She reaches the other end and starts back. In the foreground we can see the older man struggling to orient himself on the track. His physical therapist is working with him. Sally turns suddenly, looks at him, and says, "Mr. Gilman, you did beautiful!" "Thank you," he says. She continues to the end of the track. On her her next trip, she walks along, looking at Mr. Gilman affectionately. "Isn't he beautiful?"

5. Sally in bed. She recalls the time a doctor found her crying, something he had never seen her do before. She explains that she had met a man that day who was a father of several young children. When she learned that he was dying of leukemia, "That did shake the devil out of me." He told her, "If I could only see what my children are going to be like."

6. Sally sitting up in bed, listening to classical music on the radio. She is eating her lunch. The camera focuses on her lifting a coffee cup to drink from it.

   In a closeup she says, "As far as dying, everybody has to die. It's just like a little baby. Someday that baby will be an old man or an old woman. So I have no fear of dying."

   We see her from her right side, sitting up in bed, looking out her window. A poinsettia is on the tray stand next to her. The depression in the right side of her head is clearly visible. We can hear music from an opera in the background. She has a peaceful expression on her face. Later, lying back in bed, she says, "I would like to go into coma and just drift along and then die."

7. Nurses help her pack her belongings. She is going home. Sally watches the nurses work. Then we see the ambulance attendants helping her into the stretcher. She asks one of the men what's happening in the home town.

   The two men wheel her outside the entrance, and on her lap she holds the large poinsettia plant. She is wearing a red hat.

   In the back of the ambulance she is propped up on the stretcher, her eyes closed. She recounts her hospitalizations after the tumor was discovered. "I got one reprieve. They bought me out for one Christmas."

   The ambulance arrives at Sally's house. Inside, her mother prepares the bed. Outside, Sally whoops with delight when the attendants raise the stretcher.

8. Inside the house, one of the attendants lifts her onto her bed. "Are you strong enough?" she asks. "I think so." She adds, "I'm over a hundred now." Lying in bed, she lies under the covers, a smile on her face. "Oh, Mama, there's nothing like home. . .and especially the stillness."

   A night scene. Inside, the two women are listening to classical music. Sally's mother is sewing, while Sally taps her fingers to the rhythm of violins. Her eyes are closed. We see a closeup of a photograph of the two women, before Sally became ill. Sally is standing behind her mother, and both women are smiling. Sally's hair is dark and full.

9. Sally's mother cooking. Sally is seated in a wheel chair. She has a scarf over her head. She watches her mother cleaning the dishes. She asks weakly, "Can't I rinse them out?" Her mother hands her a dish. "You can dry them." "Oh, thank you."

10. Sally being dressed by her mother. Some of her hair has grown back. Her mother feeding her. She opens her mouth wide, anticipating the spoon. We can hear the ticking of a clock in the background.

    Another scene, her mother sitting on the edge of the bed, holding a glass in her hand. Sally, lying in bed, looks up at her and their eyes meet. Sally accepts the glass and sips from it. A closeup of Sally shows her placid expression, a smile etched on her face.

11. The house in winter. A graphic appears on the screen: "Late in 1974 Sally went into coma." Then a closeup of Sally (a still image) and the words, "Sally died June 25, 1975."

--1976, Novacom, 18 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What was your impression of Sally the first time you saw her? What impact did her physical appearance have on your response to her?

2. What do you see as Sally's philosophy of life? How does that philosophy help her face her dying?

3. What images stand out in your memory after viewing this film?

4. After viewing this film, what do you think you will remember most about Sally?

II. Sally and Her Cancer.

5. How would you characterize Sally's attitude toward her physical therapy? Can you recall examples of her interaction with staff and/or other patients that exemplified that attitude?

6. Were you surprised in any way at Sally's attitude toward her cancer? How did you expect her to respond?

7. Why does the filmmaker spend so much time in scene 2 showing the nurse help Sally prepare herself for physical therapy? What was your impression of Sally's attitude in this scene?

III. Sally's Strength of Character.

8. What does Sally's interaction with Mr. Gilman (scene 4) reveal about her character?

9. Why is a good sense of humor so important to Sally? Can you recall examples of her displays of humor? How did her sense of humor affect your response to her character?

10. In scene 5 Sally recalls a time when one of the doctors found her crying. According to Sally what caused her to cry? What does her response reveal about the essence of her character?

11. What role does music play in helping viewers identify with Sally? How does music help sustain Sally in her struggle against cancer?

IV. "There's Nothing Like Home."

12. When you realized that Sally was leaving the hospital to return home (scene 7), what did you expect her home environment to be like? How did you respond when you saw her mother planning to take care of her?

13. What was your impression of Sally's interaction with her mother when she returned home?

14. What does the idea of "home" mean to Sally?

15. When Sally is home (scene 8) we see her mother sewing while Sally listens to classical music. The filmmaker inserts a closeup of the photograph of the two women, before Sally became sill. Sally is standing behind her mother, and both women are smiling. Sally's hair is dark and full. How did the juxtaposition of the scene at home with the photograph affect your emotional response to the scene?

16. In scene 10 we see Sally's mother hold a glass of water up to Sally, who is lying in bed. What do you think the filmmaker intended to convey with this image?

V. General Questions.

17. When you saw Sally for the first time, how old did you think she was? Compare your initial response with the fact that Sally is 44 years old.

18. At the end of the film we learn that Sally died after being in a coma for nearly six months. How does that information affect your response to Sally's story? How is her death after being in a coma ironic when you consider Sally's words in scene 6?

19. How would you characterize the film's portrayal of the health-care providers who interact with Sally? Why didn't we see Sally's doctor in the film?

20. How was your response to Sally's story affected by the filmmaker's references to the changing seasons, particularly in the images of Sally's home in winter and then in spring at the end of the film?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Sally's strength of character is evident in many scenes in this film. Note the following scenes that show Sally interacting with others either in the hospital or at home. Consider the questions below as they relate to each of the scenes:

a) What did the scene reveal about Sally's character and/or her attitudes toward aging?

b) How would you characterize her interactions with other people in the scene?

c) What was the mood of the scene? How was the mood affected by the nature of the surroundings? How was it affected by Sally's attitude?

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1) Sally being prepared for physical therapy (scene 2):

2) Sally at physical therapy (scene 4):

3) Sally leaving the hospital (scene 7):

4) Sally arriving at her mother's house and later alone with her mother (scene 8):

5) Sally helping her mother with the dishes (scene 9):

6) Sally lying in bed, her mother feeding her (scene 10):

HARRIET AND BILL: SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The two are seated in separate chairs in a hospital waiting area. This section is filmed in black and white. Bill leans forward to page through a magazine. Harriet sits back in her chair, her arms and leg crossed tightly. She mutters, "If we come here, and this is a wasted trip, I am really going to explode." Bill says, "Uh huh." Without looking at her, he asks, "What's on your schedule this week?" We see her stare at him, pumping her legs up and down. "I'm going out every day of the week, every night of the week." Bill says, "Good." Then she leans forward, shuffling the magazines and adds under her breath, "With all my boy friends." Bill reacts with a grimace. Suddenly we see Harriet in a closeup begin to laugh. Bill doesn't react, but sits up stiffly in his chair. Her laughs become sobs, and when he sees her crying, he offers his handkerchief. Their eyes meet as she wipes her tears.

2. They enter an elevator and stand apart from each other, while a song plays in the background ("All my friends grow old as I grow wiser"). Inside one of the rooms, a doctor examines Bill. In the background Harriet sits, leaning against the wall, supporting her head with her arm, staring at the scene in front of her.

3. In their car, the scene filmed in color. They don't speak. Change to a scene by the water. The family is swinging on a rope, jumping into the water. Harriet swims alone, while their two boys swing on the ropes. Bill gathers in one of the boys, and we see Harriet standing unsteadily on shore. "Next time I go out there, I'm catching the first motorboat and I'm leaving all of you." Bill jumps off the rope into the water, losing his hairpiece. He and one of the boys laugh at this.

   Inside the house, one of the boys watches Bill drying his hairpiece with a blow dryer.

4. We see Harriet sitting, dejected, in someone's office. A family friend? A counselor? A minister? Harriet shares her feelings. "The only time I am relieved--can get this out of my mind, is when he's gone to the hospital." She realizes he is dying. "And then I'll be left with two teen-aged boys. I'm sorry, but I'm not looking forward to that. I would rather be left now, and maybe get them another father." Her voice is strained as the camera stays on her. "Two teen-aged boys, in this kind of world. . .it's causing a bridge in our marriage. He even said, 'What happened to the sweet girl I married?' And I said, "That sweet girl is being tortured by this cancer." A reaction shot of the man, showing his compassion. She continues, "If he's got to go, why can't it be quick and get it over with?" She almost breaks down.

5. The family together outside their house. The boys are playing with a tenpins game, which uses a ball on the end of a rope to knock over the pins. The boys yell at each other. Harriet and Bill, seated on opposite sides of the game table, look on impassively. One of the boys flings the rope wildly,

and both parents caution him to be careful. He stalks off as Bill gets up and begins to replace all of the pins. The boy paces restlessly behind Harriet, then yells "Shut up!" to his brother. Bill turns around and tries to discipline him. But the boy evades his grasp and walks away. The other boy looks on nervously.

6. A scene in the backyard. One boy is kicking a soccer ball. Bill tends his roses while Harriet mows the grass, pushing the mower with some difficulty. She walks past Bill, who is examining petals of a red rose. Then we see her pushing the mower uphill with all her strength.

7. Harriet approaches the car, which is parked at McDonald's. She dispenses the food to the family. The boys are irritable. Suddenly Bill complains that she brought him the wrong hot pie. "I'm sorry, Hon," she smiles, trying to appease him. He grumbles, "That's okay," obviously not satisfied. As they sit silent in the car, we can hear part of the song, "The Way We Were," in the background.

   Driving home. When they stop, the boys get out. "Say good-bye to Daddy." Harriet and Bill drive on in the rain. They enter a hospital, the sounds of muzak in the background.

8. Harriet in the car alone, driving back. In the kitchen, she orders one of the boys to wash his hands, then tells them to set the table. She slaps one of the boys when he doesn't listen. They eat dinner. "I told you to put that down and cut it right and eat it right," she orders. The boys remain irritable. "Will you stop playing with your food!"

   She is on the phone with Bill. As she listens, she turns to check on the boys. "Have you finished with your homework?" "YES!" one of the boys screams. "What's the story for Thursday? So then I come get you on Friday as usual?" She tells Bill that she picked out the cemetery lot for Bill. She appears nervous talking about this. Bill asks to talk to Steve.

   We see Harriet leaning against the counter in the kitchen, watching the boys talking to their father. She even glances directly at the camera for a moment. "Cut it short," she says abruptly. "Say good-bye to Daddy." She takes the phone. "Okay. Bye-bye. I'll see you on Friday." She hangs up and turns on the boys. "All right. Get out that clarinet!" But Steve keeps on writing his homework, ignoring her. Frustrated, she turns away and reaches for the ruler in a drawer. "You're not tracing a damned thing. Now get it out!" she warns, pointing the ruler at him. "Your father sent in a check for $21 for four months and you're playing it!" He gets up.

9. In the boys' bedroom, they lie in their bunk beds. She kisses both good night. When the cat gets under the bed, Harriet reaches down to coax it out. Steve reaches over and grabs his mother's neck. "Get downstairs before I kill you," he says quietly. Later, she stands at the door to the room like a guard. "No more talking now."

10. Back at the hospital. Harriet confronts Bill with a problem. Steve got mad at her and started to run from the car. She grabbed him, but he got away. "And he's running from me, in front of all the parents at West Street School, screaming, and I'm saying, "Stevie! Come back here! Well, I was furious. When I got home did I beat him. Boy, I gave it to him good. He

did his usual act, throwing himself on the floor, pretending he couldn't breathe." Bill looks at her with little expression in his face. She blurts out, "The longer this is dragged out, the worse it's going to get on all of us." His answer: "What do you want me to do?" We see his glum expression as she says, "Nothing. Nothing." Then a reaction shot of her. "Just keep going from day to day."

11. Harriet in the doctor's office. When he comes in, she immediately begins to share her feelings: "I was in here before, and I told you how I felt, and I thought you understood." She is fighting to hold back tears. "The longer this is prolonged, the worse it's going to get." She mentions that her son "even said something about Daddy is going to die." The doctor listens attentively. "This whole situation is getting terrible, and the longer you prolong this. . .if you leave me with two teen-aged boys, that's going to be terrible." She pounds on the chair for emphasis. "I refuse to be left with two teen-aged boys." The doctor nods sympathetically. "I really was relieved when we thought progression had started. I'm sorry, that may sound terrible to you." He interrupts, "How do you think it would be different if Bill were to die now? You'd still be left with two teen-aged boys at some time." Her answer: "But we would get over it, and I feel that I'm young enough, and that I could remarry. And maybe have a happy life, and the boys could have a new father. I know this sounds horrible." He asks her why she thinks it sounds horrible. "You know, talking about this kind of thing. A new father and everything." She is near breaking down. "I prayed the chemotherapy wouldn't work." She shakes her head from side to side. "If he's got to go, why can't it just be quick and get it over with?"

    The doctor answers carefully. "You are frustrated by not having a definite time given to you. But we can't predict. Trying to deal with the uncertainty is present in the families of all patients." Harriet dries her eyes. "But we also have to take into consideration what Bill's feelings are. He has a right to make some of these decisions.

    Later, Harriet watches as a doctor takes some blood from Bill. She sits upright in her chair, quiet, as he puts on his hairpiece. They are ready to leave. She checks the drawer of the bed-table to make sure they haven't forgotten anything.

12. Harriet and Bill sitting on their patio. "Did your arm hurt today?" Staring straight ahead, Bill answers, "No." Harriet says, "I'm glad to hear that." She is not looking at him. Another shot shows them looking straight ahead, not at each other. She leans forward to take a glass of tea, but as she starts to drink from it, she begins to laugh, her body shaking convulsively. She glances at him briefly as she laughs, her shoulders shaking, but he stares straight ahead.

A graphic appears on a black frame: "Bill died July 19, 1975."

--1976, Novacom, 24 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. How were you affected emotionally by this film? Did you sympathize with one person more than the other as you viewed the film? What do you think are some of the factors that contributed to that response?

2. What do you think are some of the reasons Harriet and Bill wanted this film to be made? Can you recall specific scenes in which Harriet and Bill were communicating their thoughts and feelings directly to viewers?

3. Did viewing this film help you reflect on your personal attitudes and/or feelings about dying or about the process of grief?

II. Harriet and Bill: A Study in Denial.

4. What was your impression of Harriet and Bill when you first saw the couple in the hospital waiting area? What examples of non-verbal communication did you notice in this scene?

5. When you first saw Harriet and Bill together in the waiting area of the hospital, which of the two people did you think was dying? How did the filmmaker help you resolve that question?

6. In the first scene Harriet tells Bill, "I'm going out every day of the week, every night of the week." Later in scene 3, when the family is swimming, Harriet yells, "Next time I go out there, I'm catching the first motorboat and I'm leaving all of you." Why does she make these statements? What effect do you think her statements have on Bill?

7. What was your impression of scene 6, showing Bill tending his roses while Harriet mows the grass?

8. Evaluate Harriet and Bill's ability to communicate throughout this film. Can you think of any factors that would have improved their ability to communicate?

9. In the last scene of the film (scene 12), Harriet and Bill are sitting together on their patio. Suddenly Harriet begins to sob, and as her body shakes convulsively, Bill stares straight ahead. What do you think the filmmaker meant to convey by ending the film with this scene?

III. Bill: Alone With Cancer.

10. In scene 3 we see the family swimming together. At one point Bill loses his hairpiece after he jumps into the water. Were you surprised when

V. A Family Divided.

19. As the course of Bill's illness progressed, what happened to the dynamics of the family relationships? What roles were being affected? What adaptations were required? To what extent were individual family members adapting successfully to the required changes?

20. Why does the filmmaker include scene 5, showing Harriet and Bill sitting outside their house, watching their boys playing ten-pins? How does that scene establish the dynamics of this family's relationships?

21. How would you characterize the mood of most of the scenes showing the family together? Can you recall specific examples of scenes that contributed to that overall mood? What factors contributed to that mood?

22. If Harriet and Bill's two children had had an opportunity to reveal their feelings to someone, what do you think they would have said?

23. Do you think Harriet and Bill told their two children that Bill was dying? What do you think they should have told their children about Bill's condition?

24. What form of counseling do you think would have been most effective for this family? What would have been some of the objectives of that counseling?

VI. General Questions.

25. What are some of the lessons this film teaches about the effects of grief on a dying person as well as the persons' family?

26. Harriet and Bill would not be considered "old" in terms of gerontological norms. Do you think the film is appropriate for use in the study of gerontology?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET A

Harriet and Bill never are shown together, talking about Bill's impending death. When we see them together, we learn "indirectly" about their feelings, thoughts, and fears. Refer to each of the scenes noted below and consider the following questions:

a) What examples of non-verbal communication did you notice in the scene? If you were to "translate" the non-verbal communication, what do you think people were "saying" to each other in each scene?

b) What did those examples of non-verbal communication convey about the basis of Harriet and Bill's relationship in the scene?

c) What did you learn about the basis of family relationships in the scene? How were the roles of individual family members affected by their response to Bill's dying?

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1) In the first scene (filmed in black and white), showing Harriet and Bill at the hospital (in the waiting area, in the elevator, and in the hospital room):

2) Harriet and Bill swimming together with their children (scene 3):

3) Harriet and Bill sitting outside their house, watching the two boys playing ten-pins (scene 5):

4) The family in their car outside McDonald's restaurant and then driving home (scene 7):

5) Harriet visiting Bill in the hospital (scene 10):

6) Harriet and Bill sitting together on their patio (scene 12):

SAMPLE WORKSHEET B

Imagine that both Harriet and Bill were given a sheet of paper, about the size of this page, and asked to draw--from their point of view--what death, or dying, looks like. The only restriction: they must include themselves in the picture.

Choose one of the two people and reproduce below what you think that person would draw. After completing your sketch, compare it with sketches drawn by others who have viewed the film. Consider the following questions:

1) What does the sketch reveal about the person's emotional and/or psychological state of mind?

2) What does the sketch suggest about their attitude toward dying or to the process of grief they are experiencing?

INTRODUCTION

This film depicts the relationship between two retired men, who reside in an old hotel in an area of town that is beginning to experience symptoms of urban decay. Jim, a widower, responds angrily to what he perceives as an unbearable affront to his dignity and respectability when he learns that women will be allowed to live in his hotel, formerly restricted "for gentlemen only." Feeling betrayed by the former owner, who has sold his interest in the hotel, Jim's anger turns into depression, and he sulks quietly in the hotel bar and then in his room. His faithful friend, Hughie, is at first perplexed by Jim's feelings of emotional loss, but in the end he sticks by him and finally helps Jim recover from the doldrums.

Anger and depression are emotions we often associate with loss, and by portraying those feelings honestly and realistically in the stories of Jim and Hughie, the filmmaker asks us to evaluate the sources of the characters' pain and be more sympathetic with what otherwise might be considered irrational behaviors on their part. One of the primary sources of Jim's emotional response is his strong attachment toward the hotel as his home, where he is secure, self-confident, and as he says, "content." Although he lives in a single room in a run-down hotel, he takes pride in his surroundings and thinks of his room as a reflection of his character and sense of identity. Moreover, Jim feels that he "belongs" there, and he wants to maintain that focus of meaning in his life. In other words, what seems like a simple change--allowing women to live in this hotel--becomes a threatening gesture to Jim, undermining his self-confidence. He feels that his home is being taken away from him and that he is powerless to resolve this conflict in his life. When he learns that the former owner, someone he could relate to easily, will not be coming back, feelings of helplessness and depression overpower him, and he loses all sense of his individuality and self-esteem.

Unable to reconcile himself to the impending changes in his life, Jim finally decides to strike back by setting off the hotel fire alarm. Although his friend Hughie considers this unwarranted and irrational behavior, Jim pleads with him to understand the depth of his anguish: "Don't you feel sometimes you're being shoveled under?" When Hughie refuses to participate in this prank, Jim loses his temper and accuses Jim of not being his friend. Left alone in the hallway, standing in front of the fire alarm, Hughie faces a singular dilemma: taking part in a childish prank vs. rekindling the sparks of self-confidence and self-esteem in Jim's character. After a moment of reflection, Hughie pulls the switch on the alarm.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask your audience to think about the title of this film. What thoughts are provoked by the use of the word gentlemen? What images does the

title generate? What types of characters do the viewers expect to see in the film? Ask them to consider what different ideas might be generated if the title of the film were Single Room Occupancy Only. Your audience should consider the stereotypes associated with characters who live in "single room occupancy" accomodations. You may suggest that this film attempts to depict a similar environment from the point of view of the older people living within it.

2) Viewers might consider the various responses older people make to losses. Are there any expected or predictable responses that most people share in common? What factors inhibit people from revealing the extent of their loss and/or grief? What signs should practicioners look for when assessing the individual's losses? How does a person's response to loss affect the form of treatment that should be administered? What variables are considered when we interact with people whose losses have been severe to them? Tell your audience that the film addresses some of these issues--sometimes in a humorous vein, sometimes in a serious way--in its portrayal of the two main characters' stories.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. A busy street corner, where old hotels, garish restaurants and bars, and other shops reveal signs of urban decline.

   Inside one of the hotels, Jim, one of the elderly residents, walks down a hall, stops at another man's room, and looks in. Hughie, a small man with gray hair, is sitting on his bed, playing cards. Jim walks away without saying hello.

   Downstairs, Jim gossips with some of the other old men in the lobby. He seems confident, even chipper. He begins to talk to the young woman at the desk, but she doesn't seem interested in "passing the time." She tells him that she is the niece of the hotel's owner, Christy. When she tells him that Christy won't be coming back, he laughs in disbelief. He asks her what the lumber he saw being carried into the hotel is to be used for, and she says that there will be some renovation of the hotel so that women's bathrooms can be built. He is outraged. "You can't do that! This hotel is for gentlemen only! She ignores his tirade. When he asks her for his mail, she says, "What's your name?" He laughs nervously and exclaims, "Now that's a question that don't get asked me much around here!" She repeats the question. After giving her a harsh look, he stalks away.

2. We see him in a bar, but he is cranky with the bartender, who tries to offer him a free drink. Later, he is seated on a bench at an intersection, brooding, when he spies a blind man coming down the street, striking his guide dog with his cane. Jim accuses him of beating his dog. "It's no business of yours!" the blind man yells. Jim persists, until finally the old man swings his cane at Jim and runs off, screaming for the police. Jim

shouts after him, 'I hope he chews the ass off of you, you old blind bastard!

3. Inside Jim's room. The camera sweeps across his room, showing some of his personal effects, the blue paint on the walls, his pipe and a bourbon bottle on the window sill. Jim is lying on his bed, dressed only in his slacks. Hughie knocks and comes in, but Jim responds gloomily to Hughie's friendliness. He shows Hughie a postcard Christy sent him from Florida. "I'll bet he's really content there," Hughie offers. But Jim challenges this, because he thinks Christy has betrayed his real home--the hotel. "This is my home, and I'm content!" he exclaims. "Everything I own is in this room." He is proud that his room is neat. 'I can't live like some of those old guys--all dirt and garbage." Jim prods Hughie to get up and look at how clean his bathroom is. Although Hughie has seen the bathroom before, he finally goes over to the other side of the room and stands inside the wooden stall built around the stool. After a moment he returns to his chair and announces, "You sure got an immaculate bathroom." Jim offers the postcard to Hughie, but he won't take it. Jim angrily flings it onto the bed and explodes, "Son of a bitch, Christy!" Hughie sits nearby, looking sympathetic. "How long he live here? Forty years, huh? He built this place, he prospered, he made friends. Why you and me knew him longer than anyone anywhere else has! Frustrated, he mumbles, "I'm gonna be getting out of here pretty soon, anyway, so they can do what they like with the place." Concerned, Hughie asks, "Where'd you go, Jim?" "Anywhere," Jim says. Hughie tries to get Jim to go out for a beer, but Jim refuses, then rudely orders Hughie to leave him alone.

4. We hear a catchy tune, and see Jim walking on the street, Hughie following him from a distance at first, trying to get his attention. But Jim, determined to be alone, answers him rudely and finally walks off alone.

   We spot Jim seated alone on a street corner bench, looking at a two-story wood-framed house across the street. We hear the sound of children playing. Then Jim walks up to a fence around the front yard. A woman comes out to the front door. She is wearing a housecoat, and her hair is in curlers. "You looking for someone?" He tells her he used to live there. She is friendly. 'You like to come in and have a look around?" He says no. They begin to talk and she comes closer. He tells her where he lives and mentions the renovations planned at his hotel. "That place don't need renovations--it needs demolishing," she says. But he disagrees. "Oh, no. We're pretty exclusive there and kinda cut off from the riff-raff. It's mostly retired gentlemen, like myself." Then he tells her that women will be allowed after renovation. She comes out to the fence now. They stand close to each other, the gate between them. He scoffs at the idea of a woman running a gentlemen's hotel. She asks if he will leave. "Not until I receive some personal compensation." She looks somewhat puzzled at this remark. "You see, Christy and I were good friends for years and years." Disgusted, he mutters as if to himself, "Some people are such damned fools!" then walks away, leaving the woman standing at the gate.

5. We see him sitting on the wooden fire escape outside the hotel. Hughie comes out the door a story above him and sees him below. He tells Jim he is going to a funeral and asks him if he wants to come along. But when Jim

discovers that neither one of them knows he deceased, Hughie explains, "I just started thinking what it would be like at my funeral, with just a handful of mourners." Jim laughs, and says the deceased probably won't care how many are there. Hughie tries to persuade him to come along, but Jim makes a cynical remark, implying that Hughie is wasting his time. Hughie says, "What are you gonna do? Stay outside here and brood?" Jim says, "I think I'm gonna ring the fire alarm." Hughie can't believe it. He asks Jim why he would do such a thing. "Why not? After all the years I've been here, we've never had a fire drill." Hughie tries to stop him. "It's against the law. Everyone will panic." Jim says, "But it's better for them to panic when there isn't a fire than to panic when there is." Hughie follows Jim inside the building.

6. Inside, Jim argues his case passionately. "Doesn't the same thing bug you? Don't you feel sometimes that you're being shoveled under?" Hughie urges him to change his mind. "What you need is to relax! Jim cries, "Relax! I'm going to relax myself into oblivion!" He heads for the alarm box. He stands there, poised, ready to break the glass. Hughie tries a last-ditch ploy: "I'll tell!" Jim laughs at this threat, but when Hughie starts down the stairs, Jim breaks down. "Now you're starting to unveil your true character! You're a squealer! I was beginning to believe you were my friend!" Jim begins to sob desperately. "You're just like Christy! Damned fool! And another thing! If I die ahead of you, don't bother comin' to my funeral, cause I sure as hell ain't gonna be there!" He storms off into his room and slams the door.

7. Hughie is left in tears. He starts to go down the stairs. We see the fire alarm box in a closeup. Hughie looks at it, thinks a moment, then breaks the glass.

   Inside his room, Jim looks up and we see a look of joy spread across his face. "He did it! The little bastard did it!" He goes out into the hall. We hear shouts from other rooms. Jim find Hughie crouching on the stair, his hands over his ears. "Are we still buddies?" Hughie asks. Jim embraces him joyfully, then tells him they should scram before the police arrive.

   Outside the hotel, the two climb down the fire escape, jump down onto the parking lot, and run off like two kids after a caper.

--1977, Wombat Productions, 28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. Were you surprised in any way by the two main characters in the film? What type of characters did you expect to see?

2. What "losses" were either referred to in the film or exemplified in the characters' experiences?

II. Jim's Anger.

3. Why did Jim become angry when the young woman, Christy's niece, repeated her question, "What's your name?"

4. Why was Jim so adamant about keeping women out of the hotel?

5. What is the source of Jim's anger toward Christy, the owner of the hotel?

6. What effect did Jim's repeated use of expletives (especially in the scenes with the blind man, with Hughie in Jim's room, and his argument with Hughie in the hallway) have on our understanding of his character? Would we have understood his character as well if he had done no swearing?

III. Hughie, a Faithful Friend.

7. Why did Hughie keep coming back to Jim?

8. What values do you think are most important to Hughie?

9. Why did Hughie plan to attend the funeral of the man he never even met?

10. Why did Hughie ring the fire alarm?

IV. Responses to Loss.

11. Why did Jim visit the two-story, wood-framed house, where the woman came outside and talked to him?

12. In the climactic scene (Scene 6) where Hughie tries to persuade Jim not to ring the fire alarm, both men end up in tears. What effect did their emotional response have on you? What did their response reveal about their feelings?

13. Why was it so important to Jim that he ring the fire alarm?

V. Jim and Hughie: Two Friends.

14. What is the purpose of the long scene between Hughie and Jim regarding Jim's pride in his "immaculate" bathroom?

15. What do you think is the basis of Jim and Hughie's friendship?

16. What did Hughie and Jim learn about themselves in the film? What did they learn about friendship?

VI. General Questions.

17. What do you think Jim's idea of a "gentleman" is?

18. Do you feel that your attitude toward either of the main characters changed as you viewed the film? What were some of the factors that spurred that change in attitude?

For Gentlemen Only

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Throughout the film viewers are asked to identify with Jim's point of view in order to understand his emotional responses to the "loss" he feels. As you view each of the following scenes, consider these questions:

1) What emotions are central to the scene? How are Jim's emotions related to his feelings of loss?

2) What does the action in the scene reveal about Jim's character and his values, particularly his attitude toward his residence in the hotel. How are those values, as well as his sense of self-confidence and self-respect, being challenged in the scene?

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1) When the clerk at the desk does not know Jim's name (scene 1):

2) Jim sees a blind man beating his dog with his cane (scene 2):

3) Jim shows Hughie the postcard from Christy (scene 3):

4) Jim forces Hughie to look at his bathroom stall inside his room (scene 3):

5) Jim revisits a house he used to live in (scene 4):

6) Jim tells Hughie he plans to ring the fire alarm in the hotel (scene 5):

INTRODUCTION

Grieving: Suddenly Alone is the third in a series of films produced by the University of Southern California on the subject of aging. Originally titled Grief when it was released in 1980, the film was rereleased in 1982 under its new title. The film explores the complex set of responses one person makes when grieving after the death of a spouse. The opening scene shows Katie and her family on the day of the funeral, standing at the gravesite. The filmmaker follows Katie through weeks of personal agony and torment as she strives to adjust to her new role as "widow." Along the way she expresses a wide range of emotions, including anger, depression, fear, and self-doubt. Because the filmmaker portrays Katie's story from her point of view, the audience is given a rare opportunity to witness the individuality of grieving; for example, we see Katie spending hours lost in reminiscences, listening to old records; wearing her husband's bathrobe for days; setting an extra place setting of dishes on the table before a meal; sitting on the couch for hours, letting the phone ring and not answering it; and after surviving the depths of despair attending a grief support group and sharing her feelings with others who have experienced losses. At the same time the universality of Katie's emotions and behavior are apparent, and viewers will be able to identify with her prolonged struggle to accept her pain and to regain some sense of identity after her loss. The film offers no easy answers to the grieving process, and it communicates successfully the theme that the individual must work through that process on her own terms in order to accept the past and live in the present.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Prepare your audience for viewing the film by noting that the film examines the complex responses an individual makes when confronted with grief. The filmmaker encourages viewers to understand the individualized nature of the process of grief and to identify with the grieving person's experiences by presenting the narrative from the point of view of grieving person. Ask your audience to note examples of individualized emotions and behaviors that the main character, Katie, experiences.

2) The film highlights the subtle changes that take place in personal and social relationships after the death of a spouse. Ask your audience to consider the factors that may account for these changes in the basis of relationships. To what extent can individuals who are experiencing grief reestablish former relationships? How do such changes in relationships affect the process of grief?

3) The process of grief conventionally has been divided into five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Ask your audience to compare the main character's experience with this five-fold division. To what extent are her experiences consistent with this interpretation of the process of grief?

4) If the film is to be used as part of a workshop or seminar on the grieving process, the workshop leader should prepare the audience by asking them to share their responses to the following questions:

   What aspects of the process of grief are common to all people?
   What are some examples of individualized responses to loss? What are the sources of such individualized responses?
   What are some of the factors that enable individuals to resolve their grief?

   These and other questions will prepare the audience for the emotions, actions, and conflicts portrayed in the film and stimulate their discussion of the ideas presented in the film.

5) The film examines the process of grief from the point of view of the dynamics of the family's involvement with Katie. Tell your audience to compare the family's initial response to Katie's grief (immediately after the funeral) to their later response (after Katie has gained some perspective on her personal struggle). Ask your audience to watch for one scene that demonstrates most clearly that the family has begun to resolve their feelings and reestablish their identity as a family unit.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Scene at a gravesite, where a funeral is in progress. We see the widow, Katie, her son, and her daughter-in-law reacting to the scene. The service ended, the minister consoles the woman: "I'll be in to see you in a day or two."

2. Katie seated in her living room after the funeral service. She looks around at the crowded room of mourners and hears snatches of whispered conversations. She looks numb, distant from the people around her. A woman approaches her and says, "I know how you feel. I remember how it was for me when Jack died. When you need someone to take your problems to, I'll listen."

   After the guests leave, her family gathers around her. Her daughter-in-law says, "If it was me, I'd fall apart at the seams." Her son admires her strength too, comparing her to the Rock of Gibraltar.

3. Katie alone in the house for the first time. She moves through the rooms quietly, remembering the words of those who comforted her.

She goes into her bedroom and looks at the picture of her husband. She looks at the empty bed. "Just like the Rock of Gibraltar," she muses.

Sitting in her living room, she listens to a radio station playing music from the old days. She is dressed in a plain cotton wrapper, her hair uncombed.

4. Katie at the store where she volunteers. She speaks to the woman she works with: "You told me not to come back until I'm ready." One week has passed since the funeral. Her friend expresses concern that her grief work needs to be completed before she returns. Katie sees an old friend there, who tells her to say hello to her husband. Katie is stunned, and she can't think of a reply.

   At her son's house, eating with their family. "It's like the old days," he says. Her daughter-in-law notices that Katie is not eating well. "You should take better care of yourself." Katie mentions the sedatives she is taking. Then she expresses anger at her husband's physician for his poor treatment and her husband's employer, who "worked him to death." Her family is shocked at her outburst. Everyone seems uncomfortable.

5. Katie in her bed, waking up from a nightmare. She tries to sleep, but we can see the strain of her mental anguish taking its toll.

   Her son and daughter-in-law at her house, helping her clean out the closets. She sits like a stone on the edge of the bed. When her son starts to pack away some of his father's clothes, she stops him. "Leave your father's things alone." But he wonders, "There's no reason to. He can't use them anymore. He's--gone." Katie cries out, "A lot you care! You hardly saw him. You never really loved him!" Then she catches herself and asks them to forgive her. Both young people comfort her.

   Katie alone in the bedroom. She takes her husband's robe out of the closet, rubs the fabric against her cheek, and puts it on. Then she lies on the bed and rocks back and forth, curled up in the fetal position.

6. Rummaging through papers in her husband's desk, Katie finds an insurance policy, but she can't quite understand what it means.

   She calls her son, who is at work. He is in the middle of a project, but he tries to console her. "We've taken care of all that." But she is insistent. She wants him to see her right away. "You don't care what happens!" she cries. He insists that he cares, but he can not leave work. "Everything is under control. Don't worry." After their conversation, Katie returns to the papers and finally gives up, exasperated. "How could you ever do this to me? I hate you for dying!"

   Later, sitting immobile on the couch, still wearing the housecoat, she ignores the phone when it rings.

7. At her work again. She confides in her friend, "I feel like Humpty-dumpty after the fall. I can't even cry." Her friend listens, then says firmly, "Don't blame yourself. The same thing happened to me. I felt terribly guilty for a long time." Katie wonders how she will get over the pain. "It wasn't easy," her friend admits. "The things I tried so hard not to think about. I had to face them all." Katie is fearful of the pain, but her friend repeats her message: "You'll cry yourself out and eventually the pain will go away."

8. Alone at home, Katie watches television late at night, curled up in a chair. She wears her husband's housecoat. Her face is haggard, her hair uncombed, her eyes glazed over.

   Later, we see her waking up in bed, doubling over in pain, as if nauseated.

   During the day she routinely sets out two place settings at the kitchen table. Then she stands back and looks at what she has done. She goes into the bedroom and looks at her husband's picture, but each time she holds it up she drops it on the bureau. Finally, she accidentally tips over one of the bottles of cologne on the bureau, and she is overcome with grief, putting her head down and crying as she stands there. Later, we see her standing by her window, crying.

9. In the bathroom she looks into her mirror and begins to apply some makeup to her face.

   In the bedroom with her son and daughter-in-law, again packing away her husband's clothes. But this time she is calm, even serene, as she packs away the clothes, even joking about some of the good old days. She folds the housecoat she had been wearing and places it in a box with the other clothes.

   Later that night the family looks at old home movies of the family years ago. We see her husband at the beach, and when Katie's granddaughter begins to cry, Katie consoles her, "You go ahead and cry. Even grown-ups have to cry." In the movies we see Katie and her husband walking arm in arm, and then we see Katie's reaction; she looks at peace with herself.

10. She talks with her friend at the shop. Katie is thinking about selling her house, but her friend advises her not to act hastily. Katie realizes, "I'm going through the same thing you went through." Her friend says, "Every widow goes through the same thing."

    Katie and her son going over her finances. He concludes that she has "more than enough." She lays out her goals: "I just want to know what's going on." You don't have to, because I'm going to take care of all of this for you," her son promises. But Katie is adamant: "If you do, then I'll be just as helpless as I was before. I'm going to learn how to handle these things myself." He accepts her request and they get started.

11. Katie on the phone with another friend. She tells the friend that she would like to attend a ball with her and her husband. The friend is surprised that Katie wants to join them, but she accepts. Then we see Katie a fifth person at the dinner dance, and she is excluded from their conversation. She looks very uncomfortable.

    Katie with her friend from work, the two walking in the park. Katie wonders if all of her friends will drift away, as it seems to be happening already. "It's like starting over again," she says. Her friend agrees, "You're a brand new person."

12. Walking past a church bulletin board, Katie notices a sign advertising a grief support group meeting at the church.

We see Katie sharing her feelings with other group members, men and women: ". . .We all have to grieve. That was very hard for me in the beginning. I felt like I would never survive the pain, and I fought desperately to hold it all inside. After a while, when I learned to let it out. . . ." Here the credits begin as the scene continues in the background.

--1982, University of Southern
California, 28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What do you think the filmmaker was trying to communicate about the process of grief in this film?

2. What actions by the main character were most unexpected or surprising to you? Were you able to account for those actions within the context of the film?

3. Were you able to identify with the emotions and actions of the main character, Katie? What aspects of the film fostered this identification with Katie?

4. What does Katie eventually learn about the process of grief?

II. Katie's Responses to Loss.

5. What emotions was Katie experiencing when she was in her house just after the funeral, surrounded by friends and by family (scene 2)?

6. What was different about the mood of scene 3 (Katie alone in the house) compared to scene 2 (Katie surrounded by friends and family)? What was the filmmaker trying to communicate by establishing that comparison?

7. What did Katie's choice of clothes and her physical appearance in many of the earlier scenes reveal about her emotional and psychological condition?

8. Why did Katie spend hours listening to music from another era (scene 3)?

9. Why does Katie return to work a week after the funeral? What goes wrong at work that day?

10. After her son and his wife leave (in scene 5--after helping her pack some of her husband's clothes), why does Katie put on her husband's bathrobe? Can you recall the visual image the filmmaker employs to communicate the depth of her emotions in this scene?

III. Katie and Her Family.

11. After the funeral (scene 2), Katie's son and daughter-in-law tell her they are impressed with her emotional strength. How do we know the filmmaker wants the audience to question their response?

12. We see Katie eating dinner with her son and his family in scene 4. Evaluate the family's response to Katie's emotional state. What makes everyone uncomfortable?

13. When Katie's son and his wife are helping Katie pack her husband's clothes (scene 5), the son laughs at the memory of his father wearing a colorful Hawaiian shirt. Why doesn't Katie share in his good humor? Why does she strike out at her son in this scene? Compare this scene to the later one (scene 9), showing the family helping her pack her husband's clothes. How is the mood and the content of that later scene different?

14. In scene 6 Katie expresses her concern to her son that she does not understand the details of her financial standing. What is her son's attitude to this "problem"? What does Katie's response to his attitude reveal about her emotional and psychological condition?

IV. Stages of Grief.

15. In what scenes did you see Katie express grief through her anger? In each case were you able to account for her actions within the context of the film?

16. What visual images in the film conveyed the essence of Katie's depression?

17. Did you see examples of "denial" or "bargaining" in Katie's responses to her husband's death?

18. To what extent has Katie achieved a sense of "acceptance" by the end of the film?

19. In scene 9 we see Katie looking at her image in a mirror. In what way does this scene represent a turning point for her experience?

20. In scene 9 Katie and the family view old home movies, showing her husband, the children, and Katie in action. How would you define the mood of this scene? How does the scene contribute to Katie's psychological growth?

21. What do you think the film communicates about grief being a circular process? Can you recall a scene late in the film that illustrates that concept?

V. Sources of Emotional Support.

22. What role does Katie's friend from work play in stimulating Katie's emotional recovery? Can you recall some of the specific scenes that showed her encouraging Katie?

23. In scene 7 (when Katie is working in the store) her friend tells her, "You'll cry yourself out and eventually the pain will go away." To what extent does her statement apply to Katie's experiences?

24. What role does Katie's family play in assisting Katie's emotional recovery? To what extent is Katie forced to assist her family even more than they assist her?

VI. General Questions.

25. What attracts Katie to the idea of attending the grief support group? Why was that an appropriate outlet for her feelings?

26. To what extent does the film help viewers understand what factors enable individuals to resolve their grief?

27. Why does the filmmaker decide to begin the film with the conclusion of the funeral ceremony? Why did he decide to end the film in the middle of scene 12?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

This film is a valuable tool in educating people about the intricacies of the process of grief. Of course, viewers will gain more from the film if they can identify with the main character's emotional state of mind.

As you view the film, note briefly the action in scenes where you were able to identify with Katie's experiences:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

After viewing the film, share your responses with other viewers and consider the following questions:

a) What emotional obstacles were the most difficult for Katie to overcome?

b) What sources of emotional support were most helpful in her struggle to resolve her grief?

c) To what extent did your own personal experiences with grief help you identify with Katie's experiences?

INTRODUCTION

Although The Mailbox addresses the theme "responses to loss," it also combines themes related to the earlier chapters on symbolic statements and intergenerational relationships as well as the theme covered in the next chapter, life review. The main character, Lethe, devotes much of her time to waiting for the mail carrier to arrive. We see her at the end of her long driveway in the Western countryside, standing next to her huge mailbox. But she never receives a letter, especially from her children, who seem to have forgotten how much she thrives on an occasional letter. The filmmaker reminds us of the symbolism attached to receiving letters from home. To Lethe letters are visible signs of an emotional bond, particularly among family members. Her huge mailbox, of course, is a visual symbol of her vast warm heart, capable of giving love to all family members and friends.

The film also concentrates on intergenerational relationships. Lethe spends time with a neighbor woman, who is the age of her children, and the neighbor's daughter, who enjoys a grandparent-grandchild relationship with Lethe. But the emphasis on intergenerational relationships in this film tends to reinforce the enduring meaning of family ties. Many of the scenes between Lethe and the little girl become object lessons for the little girl, who needs to be reminded that the love and warmth of her own family, despite occasional drawbacks, is a primary value to be cherished.

Lethe's life review is evident in several scenes, where she is portrayed alone in her house, remembering her late husband and admitting her feelings of loneliness. But the sympathy viewers feel for Lethe is stimulated more by our realization of the extent of Lethe's loss as it affects her in the present than by our response to her life review. Here is a woman who is vital and interesting, concerned about her family's problems and able to articulate her point of view and share her wisdom. Unfortunately, Lethe has lost her role in her family. Instead of considering her possible contribution to their situation, or acknowledging her status as a matriarch in the family, they remain indifferent toward her, ignoring her politely, or professing the constraints of work, busy schedules, and--ironically, family concerns--as reasons for not either spending time with her or writing to her on a regular basis. As a result, Lethe is forgotten and appears neglected. If Lethe's responses to loss demonstrate the strengths of her character, to some extent they suggest an over-reliance on family ties as well. Viewers will find the that the film subtly and realistically explores these and other issues.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask your audience to consider what attributes make up the "perfect grandmother." That is, what characteristics and traits does such a woman

possess? Some viewers may want to share reminiscences of a special person in their development as children. Tell them that the main character in the film, Lethe, represents the "quintessential grandmother." Perhaps viewers will want to respond to her character after viewing the film.

2) Ask your audience to discuss the role of grandmothers in family life. Ask them to consider the idealized role grandmothers play, as portrayed in current media. Ask them to discuss the sources for that stereotype. To what extent are grandmothers true to that picture? To what extent do they differ from that stereotyped depiction?

3) The Mailbox also addresses the issue of older women living alone, especially after being widowed. In the film we see Lethe trying to maintain her household, despite the problems of rural isolation, including the brutal weather in the winter months. Ask viewers to watch for ways in which Lethe overcomes some of these obstacles. Viewers also should consider why she is determined to stay in her house instead of moving into the town or city.

4) One of the messages the film conveys is the importance of communication in the daily life of the older person. Lethe is shown repeatedly either writing letters to her family or waiting for a letter from one of her children. Consider asking your audience to share their attitudes about receiving letters from home. Why are letters a special form of communication? Do older people tend to value letters over other forms of communication? What contributes to their attitude on that subject?

5) After the last scene of the film, showing Lethe's neighbor on the phone with one of Lethe's children, the filmmaker includes an additional scene, showing the actress playing the character Lethe. We see the actress seated in a director's chair on the film set. She turns toward the camera and addresses the audience: "Have you written your parents lately, or your grandparents?" She leans over the edge of the chair, and in a commanding voice says, "Well, you'd better!"

Film users should consider an appropriate use for this additional scene. The last scene of the narrative clearly is scene 7, showing Lethe's neighbor on the phone. The film ends on an emotionally high point; Lethe's sudden death is a devestating loss for viewers who have come to identify with her character. The revelation that her daughter does not realize Lethe never read the family's letter, explaining that they were going to place her in a nursing home, makes an ironic comment on the preceding tragedy. In effect, the film is a visual representation of the old saying, "The letter killeth."

Viewers will require an opportunity to respond to the story and to express their feelings about Lethe's sudden death. If you include the additional scene (which is preceded by about a ten-second blackout) in the initial viewing, you may inhibit the audience's response to those sensitive issues. One way to incorporate the strengths of both endings is to stop the film after scene 7 and then begin discussion of the film. After your audience has shared their emotional response to the film and begun to sort out some of the ideas that are being expressed, introduce the additional scene by explaining that the filmmaker also wants to leave viewers with a message they can incorporate into their daily lives. Then show that additional scene. Viewers usually respond to this scene with laughter and sighs of relief--the point the actress makes is an obvious one, and yet it is understood and accepted by the audience because everyone can identify with the concerns being expressed. Another means of preparing the audience for the impact of this final scene is to discuss the importance of receiving letters from family members (see number 4 above).

6) As in films like Peege, Death of a Gandy Dancer, and The Hundred Penny Box, The Mailbox incorporates sophisticated film techniques, such as editing, music, and the film's structure. Examples of these techniques are noted below:

EDITING

-- The filmmaker helps us identify with the character of Lethe by carefully selecting and juxtaposing shots. For example, in scene 2 Lethe works on some needlepoint for her children. We see a woman who thrives on giving love, but after she admires her work we see her sitting quiet and alone in her room. To add to the sense of isolation and loneliness, the filmmaker cuts to a closeup of her rocker, then pulls back the camera to show her being swallowed up by the emptiness of the room.

A similar effect is gained in scene 4, when the director shows Lethe in a lonely moment, looking over the many old photographs of her husband. As we view a closeup of a picture of her husband, obviously a man of charm and vitality, we can better understand the loneliness of a woman who was left a young widow by his untimely death.

MUSIC

-- The music used in this film also helps us identify with Lethe and sympathize with her plight. The words of the song we hear when Lethe walks down her long driveway to her mailbox (in scene 6) imply that a letter is a visible sign of one's love for another person, and the haunting melody underscores the emotional loss Lethe suffers when she is deprived of that symbol of love.

STRUCTURE

-- The passage of time in the film is linked to the changing of the seasons--from fall to winter. The movement into winter emphasizes the difficulty of Lethe's isolation, living in a rural area. The winter season is also an appropriate setting for the outcome of the action--Lethe's untimely death.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. An old woman and a young girl are looking at pictures in an old photograph album. "You look so young," the little girl says. "Well, I wasn't always eighty-three," the old woman answers.

   Then we see the older woman, Lethe, and her young friend as they set out to see if any mail has come. The two walk down a long country lane, lines with tall trees.

   At the mailbox, Lethe finds it empty. After the little girl returns to her home nearby, we see the postman drive up. Lethe exchanges a warm welcome with him, and they laugh and kid with each other. But the mailman has only a utility bill for her. "Better than nothing," she says.

2. At night inside Lethe's house, we see her finishing a letter to one of her children. That completed, she sits at the table, lost in thought.

   The next day we see Lethe at her mailbox again, and a neighbor woman and her daughter (the same little girl as above) stop to talk to her. Lethe tells them of her concern when she doesn't hear from her children.

   At night inside her house, Lethe is shown admiring some of her needlepoint, a lovely pillow covering with word LOVE stitched in big letters. She sits quietly, and we see a closeup of her rocker, then the camera goes back to hold on the woman, sitting alone in her house.

3. Cookie day at Lethe's. She and the neighbor girl talk about family. Lethe says, "Family can be so lovely even if they are a bother sometimes." She tells the little girl why she stays in this remote house rather than moving into the city. "I get a little lonesome for my children and grandchildren sometimes, but I'm fine."

   We see Lethe sitting on the edge of her bed at night, talking with one of her daughters on the telephone. But her daughter does not seem interested in talking, and the call is disrupted by her complaints about the children, her husband's irritation with the expense of the call, and loud music in the background. Lethe gets no satisfaction from the call.

4. Lethe's neighbor, the woman we saw in scene 2, receives a call from Lethe's other daughter, who tells her that the family has decided to place Lethe in a nursing home. "She'll have her own room, constant care, three good meals, and have people her own age to visit with." The neighbor's reaction: "It'll break her heart." The daughter adds that the family will write Lethe to tell her all the information.

   Lethe in her house, alone again. She sits looking at pictures of her husband. "If you hadn't gone and left me a young widow, I wouldn't have to tramp out to that mailbox." She holds his picture up: "Oh, I'm so lonely," she cries.

5. After a scene showing Lethe and her neighbor return from shopping, we see Lethe walk down to the mailbox again. When she finds nothing inside, she smacks the box with her cane. But the mailman drives up at the moment and tells her that even if he did have something for her, he wouldn't be able

to read her name on the box, since the writing is so faded.

We see a close-up of a small brush, as Lethe carefully paints her name in big black letters on her mailbox. Later, the mailman drives up and laughs at her sense of humor. "What a lady." But he has no mail for her.

Lethe and the neighbor girl at Lethe's house. She shows the girl old pictures drawn by her grandchildren when they were small. "I guess they don't have time to write anymore," she says. She then suggests the little girl draw something and send it to her grandmother.

6. Lethe's mailman at her box, as he looks through the day's mail. When he spots a letter for Lethe, he says, "It's about time," and throws it in the box.

   We see Lethe wake up from a nap in her chair. Realizing she is late for the mail, she gets up hurriedly and sets out for the mailbox. As we see her walking down her driveway, we hear the haunting melody of a song about love and remembrance. When Lethe sees the letter, she rushes back to the house. Inside, we see her from a high camera angle, looking down on her as she throws off her clothes and grabs the letter opener. But just as she begins to open the letter, she has a heart attack, and slumps down in her chair.

   Outside, we see the neighbor girl trying to get Lethe's attention. She has come to play, and when Lethe doesn't answer, the girl runs home.

7. After a scene in which we see the neighbor woman comforting Lethe before the ambulance comes, we see the neighbor in her house, talking on the phone to one of Lethe's daughters. The neighbor has been crying, and when the daughter asks if Lethe had any last words, she speaks through her tears: "She said to tell them I was so happy to get their letter." We hear a sound of shock on the other end of the line.

8. After several seconds of black-out, we see the actress who played Lethe, sitting in a director's chair in front of her make-up mirror. She asks, "Have you write your parents lately, or your grandparents?" She leans over the edge of her chair, and in a commanding voice says, "Well, you'd better!"

--1977, Brigham Young Univ. Films,
23 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What did you find most interesting about Lethe's character and values? What do you think are some of the contributing factors of her character and values?

2. What were some of the techniques the filmmaker employed to provoke an emotional response on the part of viewers?

3. How did you respond to Lethe's sudden heart attack? What went through your mind when you saw her collapse? What ideas did the filmmaker intend to communicate in that scene (scene 6) and in the next scene, where Lethe's neighbor talks to Lethe's daughter on the phone?

II. The Viewer's Relationship to Lethe.

4. What was your attitude toward Lethe as you watched the film? Why do you think you felt that way?

5. How did the rural setting of the film help us identify with Lethe's situation?

6. From Lethe's point of view, what are some of the important things in life? How are her values reflected in all of her actions?

7. Why is receiving a letter so important to Lethe? Why aren't phone calls as satisfying as receiving a letter?

8. What did you see as the role of the mailman? How did he influence our attitude toward Lethe?

III. The Role of Family.

9. What attitudes and values does the film attempt to foster concerning family relationships?

10. In what ways were the neighbor woman, her daughter, and even the mailman a substitute family?

11. Why did Lethe's daughter call Lethe's neighbor to tell her that the family planned to put Lethe in a nursing home? Why didn't she call her mother instead?

12. Did viewing this film cause you to think of members of your own family? What are some of the feelings it evoked?

IV. General Questions.

13. Is the film in any way a portrayal of the plight of the rural elderly?

14. When Lethe's neighbor tells Myra (Lethe's daughter) that Lethe's last words were, "Tell them I was so happy to get their letter," Myra's reaction is one of shock. Why was that the case? How will this revelation affect viewers' responses to the scene?

15. What do you think the film tries to say about the significance of grandparent-grandchildren relationships?

16. How did the last scene in the film (where the actress who played Lethe speaks directly to the viewer) affect you? Is this last scene essential to the overall structure and message of the film?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

The filmmaker employs several techniques to help viewers identify with the character, Lethe. As you view the film, take note of the action in the following scenes and consider these questions:

a) In each scene how does the film technique help us understand Lethe's character and values?

b) What ideas do these scenes suggest about the values of family relationships?

c) Evaluate how the characters in these scenes respond to Lethe. What does she offer to each individual she relates to?

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1) The film opens with Lethe and the neighbor looking through old photograph albums:

2) After finishing a letter to one of her children, Lethe sits at her table, as if lost in thought (scene 2):

3) We see Lethe finishing a needlepoint pillow cover (scene 2). She has stitched the word LOVE on the cover. As she sits quietly, admiring it, the filmmaker cuts to a closeup of Lethe's rocker, moving slowly. Then the camera pulls back to show her across the room, sitting alone.

4) Lethe sitting on the edge of her bed at night, trying to talk to her daughter on the telephone (scene 3).

5) Lethe, sitting alone in her house, looking at pictures of her late husband. At one point she cries, "Oh, I'm so lonely."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE . . .

6. After Lethe walks down her lane to her mailbox (scene 5) and finds the mailbox empty, she slaps the side of the box with her cane.

7. We see a closeup of the mailbox, freshly painted yellow, and the letters LETHE ANDERSON clearly painted in black on the side of the box. Then the camera pulls back, and we see Lethe smiling at her handiwork.

8. Lethe and the neighbor girl look through old drawings done by Lethe's grandchildren when they were small children. "I guess they don't have time to write anymore," she says.

9. Lethe wakes up from a nap, realizes she is late for checking the mail, and sets off down the lane toward her mailbox. As we follow her progress, we hear the strains of a sad melody about love and remembrance.

10. Lethe almost misses the letter inside the mailbox (scene 6). When she looks inside the box and spots it, she reacts with glee. She strains to see the return address on the letter, and she is delighted to see that her children have written her at last.

Martin the Cobbler

INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone will be able to identify with and take delight in the story of *Martin the Cobbler.* The filmmakers employ a revolutionary animation technique, termed "3-Dimation" in the film, and now well-known as "Claymation." In this award-winning film all of the characters are constructed out of clay, and their physical movements are determined by a combination of minute changes in position--and even in facial expression--accomplished by subtle manipulations of the clay, photographed in separate frames of film, so that when the film is played at its usual running speed, the figures approximate the movements of human characters. The requisite attention to detail is impressive; and because the filmmakers employ other film techniques (including sophisticated editing, well-defined camera angles, camera movement, and closeups) normally associated with productions that incorporate human actors, the outcome is dazzling. Within a few minutes viewers easily begin to identify with the clay characters as "real" characters.

Martin's story is told simply and effectively. He is portrayed as a lonely old man, a widower, whose wife died shortly after giving birth to a son. Martin raised the boy himself, but while he was still a lad, the boy died suddenly. Martin was devastated with grief, and he never overcame the pain of his loss. We come upon him many years after his personal tragedy, and in the course of a few days we witness the miracle of his emotional and spiritual regeneration. The film's message suggests that although Martin isolated himself from human contact, he was never alone. His friend Vladimir does not desert him, a small mouse who lives in the wall of his shop continually seeks his company, the people who walk past his shop are eager to relate to him, and Martin's Creator is ready to intervene on his behalf. We are introduced to Martin when he is in the depths of despair; through the course of the film we witness his progress toward psychological and spiritual wholeness.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Tell your audience that they are about to view an animated film that uses the technique known as "claymation." Ask if anyone in the audience is familiar with that technique or has seen a film employing that technique. (Suggested titles: *Claymation*, *Closed Mondays*, or *The Creation*). If no one in your audience is familiar with this technique, tell them they are should note the way the film uses animation in order to tell a serious story that conveys several universal human conflicts and emotions.

2) Tell your audience that although they are about to view an animated film, using clay figures to represent a variety of characters, they should note the sophisticated film techniques--usually associated with expensive

Hollywood productions--that are employed to enable viewers to identify with the characters and their experiences. You may want to point out some of these specific examples:

-- The filmmaker uses closeups of the main character, Martin, at appropriate points in the film; for instance, we see him in a closeup in scene 1 in order to emphasize his lonely and wretched existence. Later, when Martin hears a mysterious voice (scenes 4 and 8), we see his face again in a closeup. More than any other film technique the use of closeups helps us to sympathize and identify with the main character.

-- The filmmaker employs well-conceived editing techniques: we see reaction shots of the main character, in order to understand the content of his emotional responses; we see shots that show the point of view of the different characters in order to understand their judgment of another character's behavior; we see time condensed in the movement between scenes.

3) Your audience should listen for a musical soundtrack that complements the other sophisticated film techniques employed in Martin the Cobbler. In this film music serves as a thematic force, helping viewers identify the specific emotions they are to feel in a given scene, and even altering the entire mood of the film when appropriate. For example, early in the film the dark, somber music underscores the morbid loneliness Martin suffers from; later in the film (scene 5), fast-paced, energetic music signals a change in Martin's mood and a movement in the story away from gloom and toward hope.

4) That part of the film's message that relates to Martin's spiritual development depends on references that are familiar to a Judeo-Christian religious background. For example, the "holy man" we see in scene 3 is more than likely a Russian Orthodox priest, and the "holy book of the Lord" he refers to probably is the Bible. The passages Martin reads (scenes 4 and 8) are from the New Testament of the Bible. Although the filmmaker does not intend to promote the specific religious heritage noted above, facilitators should be sensitive to their audience's religious background in order to use the film in an appropriate context.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The story unfolds on a small Russian town in winter. A festival is in progress outside of town. We see Martin through the basement window of his shop. He works quietly for a moment, commenting on the people who walk past his shop. Suddenly an old friend, Vladimir, enters to ask Martin if he would like to help gather firewood for the festival and even join in some of the dancing. But Martin declines gruffly. He tells Vladimir, "Life has

been good for you. For me, it's not been so good. I'm like this old shoe you see here, stitched and restitched, soled and resoled." Vladimir sighs and then leaves his shop.

2. Alone in the shop, Martin works on, while the narrator (who appears briefly before scene 1 to introduce the film) comments, "Poor Martin. It seemed to him there was nothing to live for." The narrator tells us that as a young man Martin lived for his family, but his wife died when she was a young woman, and just when his one son was about the begin to work with Martin, he died too. "Martin gave way to despair, and in his sorrow he blamed the Lord." Because it is late, Martin lights a candle and goes to a table in his shop, where he begins to drink. Suddenly he spies a small mouse behind him, sniffing for crumbs. He yells at the animal and it scurries back into its hole. Then from the mouse's point of view, we see Martin sitting at his table, finishing another drink. Martin's head slumps to his arms on the table.

3. The next day, Martin works on his shoes. A holy man visits him and requests that Martin repair the binding on an "ancient book of the Lord." Martin protests that he is the wrong man for the task, because he is without hope. "All I ask of God is that I may soon die." The holy man tries to rouse him from his despair, encouraging him to work for God, who gives him life. He leaves, promising to return in a week. He urges Martin to "read the book."

4. Later we see Martin in the background, pounding away on his shoes, while in the foreground--and in the center of the frame--we see the ancient book, laying opened on the table. Martin begins to clean up, because it is late at night. Suddenly, he sees the little mouse on the table; in fact, it is sniffing about on the book itself. Outraged at this behavior, Martin yells at the little creature, and as it scurries away, it flips several pages of the book. Martin goes to the table, sits down, and seems drawn to the book. He reads from the page that lays open in front of him. We hear him read the story of a rich merchant who invited the Lord to be his guest and then was inhospitable to him. Martin reacts earnestly: "Oh, that merchant. What kind of man was he? Like me? He only thought of himself. But who was his guest? The Lord himself. If the Lord were my guest, I would give him all the signs of welcome." He falls asleep over the book.

   Suddenly a voice calls to him, saying, "Martin?" Although Martin remains sleeping, we see his unconscious (visually: a shadowy representation of Martin himself) raise up from the table, out of the sleeping Martin, and respond to this mysterious voice, which tells him, "Look for me out on the street tomorrow, for I shall come." After the unconscious image disappears, we see Martin shake himself awake and then go to bed.

5. The next day light breaks over the houses of the city and the camera turns to Martin, busily working on his shoes. The fast-paced, upbeat music is as energetic as his activity. Martin's eye is cocked toward the window that looks out on the street. When he hears a whooshing sound outside, he perks up, but then sees it is only an old man sweeping snow off of the sidewalk. But when the old man begins to sneeze, Martin invites him inside. The two sit at the table, and while the man drinks hot tea, Martin's attention is focused on the window again. The old man asks, "Are you expecting some-

someone?" Martin laughs and shares his secret with the old man. They laugh together, and then the old man leaves, thanking him: "You've given me food for body and soul."

6. Back to work. Still watching the window, Martin hears a baby cry outside and goes to the window again. He sees a poorly-dressed woman and her child and invites them in. When she tells him she can't afford more clothes, he turns to the coat rack and takes down a lovely shawl, obviously his wife's, and offers it to the woman. She is so excited she kisses him. "The Lord bless you. Surely he must have sent you to your window." Martin has to admit, "Yes, it was no mere chance that made me look out my window today." After she leaves, we see the little mouse again, but this time Martin calls it his little friend and gives it some crumbs.

7. Martin's mood darkens. He goes to the window, but sees no one at first. Suddenly, an old woman appears, and at that moment a young boy rushes up to her and steals an apple from her bag. Disgusted, Martin runs outside to help. But when she tells Martin the boy should be whipped to an inch of his life, Martin replies, "If he should be whipped for an apple, what should be done with us?" Martin settles the dispute and makes the boy apologize. As the old woman leaves, the boy offers to help carry her bag. They leave. Chilled, Martin returns to the shop.

8. He works for awhile, but when the lamps are lit outside, his depression worsens. He sees the mouse in the corner, and he speaks kindly to it again. Martin goes to the table and begins to read the ancient book. As soon as he sits down a mysterious voice calls to him: "Martin? Do you not know me?" Martin cries, "Who is it?" He turns around, and we see from his point of view a miraculous vision--out of a fluid circle of light we see formed an image of each of the people he helped that day. One at a time they appear: the old man, the young woman and child, and the granny and the boy. Each speaks, "It is I" in their turn. The vision ends, and Martin turns around to look at the book. He reads aloud, "Whatever you do to one of these, no matter how small he be, whatever you do to your brothers and sisters, remember you do unto me." He looks up, his face shining.

9. Suddenly he sees Vladimir walk by the window, and he calls out to him. The mouse helps him find his hat, and after thanking the little creature, Martin runs outside and stops Vladimir. When Martin tells him he wants to go along to the festival, Vladimir says, "What took you so long?" Martin says, "We'll show the young people some of the old dances." They both howl like old wolves and walk off together.

--1977, Billy Budd Films, 28 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What was the nature of Martin's despair? Why did he see his situation as hopeless?

2. The name of the Tolstoy short story this film is based upon is Where Love Is God Is. Why would that also be an appropriate title for this film?

II. Martin's Relationships with Other Characters.

3. Why does Martin refuse his friend Vladimir's offer to gather firewood and go dancing at the festival?

4. What are some of the differences in character between Martin and Vladimir?

5. Why does Martin refuse to help the holy man at first?

6. What was similar about Martin's responses to all the people he met on the day he was waiting for the Lord?

7. How does the mouse play a central role in our understanding of Martin's attitude and of the film's message?

III. Martin's Vision.

8. What do you think the vision meant to Martin? Why was he "chosen" as the one to experience that vision?

9. What does the vision confirm about the nature of Martin's experiences with the old man, the young woman, and the old woman and boy?

10. As the vision departs, did you notice its circular and multi-colored shape? What do you think that part of the vision was meant to signify?

11. How did you react to the vision Martin experienced? What feelings did it evoke in you as you watched it?

IV. Religious Applications.

12. What exactly was that "ancient book of the Lord" the holy man brought Martin? Why did the filmmaker choose to use this more general title for that book?

13. In what way was the story Martin read from the "ancient book of the Lord" (Scene 4) appropriate for his experience?

14. How would you summarize the relationship between Martin and the Lord as it is portrayed in the film? Were you able to identify with that relationship?

15. What type of relationship does the film suggest is most meaningful between the believer and God?

16. In the context of the film, what does it mean to "live for God"? Why wasn't it enough for Martin to live for his work?

17. In what ways would this simple tale be relevant to the needs and concerns of religious groups? What do we learn about Christianity, for example, by viewing this film?

V. General Questions.

18. What stereotypes of aging are reinforced in the characterizations and actions in the film? What stereotypes of aging are challenged in the film?

19. In what ways does the use of music in the film complement the changing fortunes of Martin's story?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

As you view the film note the following examples of film techniques that aid the viewer's identification with the main character, Martin. In each case consider these questions:

a) What does the action in this scene reveal about the main character's emotional state of mind?

b) What technique does the filmmaker employ to help you identify with Martin's attitude and/or emotional response?

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1) The first time we see Martin we look down at him through the casement window of his cobbler shop (scene 1):

2) When he drinks himself to sleep (scene 2) we see him from the point of view of the little mouse, who is just inside his mouse hole:

3) When the holy man leaves (scene 3), after embracing Martin, the filmmaker focuses on Martin alone in the frame; then he pulls the camera back slowly while Martin stares after the holy man:

4) The next day (scene 4) Martin is hard at work in the background. In the foreground we see the ancient book of the Lord, laying open on the table, a lamp burning next to it:

5) The morning after Martin has his vision (scene 5) we see light breaking over the houses of the city from the point of view of Martin's casement window, and then the music changes to an upbeat, fast-paced accompaniment, punctuated by the drumbeat of Martin's hammer as he energetically repairs an old pair of shoes.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE . . .

6) When the young woman enters the shop with her small child (scene 6), we see Martin playing with the baby on a small bed at the back of the shop:

7) When Martin realizes the woman lacks sufficient clothes to keep the child warm (scene 6), we see him turn around and pause for a moment, looking at a lavendar shawl hanging on a peg on the wall. The shawl obviously belonged to his wife:

8) Martin becomes depressed (scene 8) when he thinks the promised visit will not materialize. We see him in closeups that show his face darken as the old despair returns:

9) After Martin sits down in front of the ancient book of the Lord (scene 8), the voice that spoke to him before speaks to him again. He turns around, and in a closeup we see him respond with a fearful, awe-inspired look on his face:

10) Then we see the vision--protean forms with bright colors--each taking the shape of one or more of the people Martin had talked to earlier:

NOTE: Can you recall the shape and color of the last image that was part of the vision? What do you think the filmmaker intended to convey with that image?

INTRODUCTION

Edmond Sechan's award-winning films The Red Balloon and The String-Bean (see Chapter One) established him as a prominent filmmaker, and he lives up to his reputation in this film, which depicts the sad tale of a lonely man who fails to experience meaningful relationships in his life. Dominated by his aging mother and intimidated by her little dog, the main character in this film attempts to overcome the emptiness of his existence by taking advantage of other people's kindness and solicitude toward the physically handicapped. One day, before taking his mother's little dog for its daily walk, he dons dark glasses and pretends to be a blind man. His little ruse succeeds far beyond his imagining, and soon he is admitted into a park and showered with affection by new-found friends and several children, who love to play with the dog. Before long even the little dog drops its hostile posture toward him and embraces their new lifestyle. Now when the time for their daily walk arrives, the animal strains at its leash, enthusiastic to leave the small apartment and head for the park.

But our character's happiness and fulfilment suddenly turns to despair when an unfortunate set of circumstances leads to the uncovering of his little ruse. At the end of the film we see him again the same frightened man he was before, now unable to confront the people in the park and renew old friendships because he can not find it in himself to admit to the lie that was the basis of these relationships.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Like his earlier film The String-Bean, Sechan's film employs no dialogue, telling its story primarily through the combination of images and music. Tell your audience to concentrate on the way the images quickly establish the relationships among the main characters and communicate the emotional reactions of the main characters when they interact. Note that the filmmaker employs a simple repetitive structure throughout the film. Ask your audience to consider some of the reasons for that type of organization.

2) Ask your audience to pay close attention to the use of music in the film. Note that the filmmaker employs two musical themes to complement the structure of the film: the main theme accompanies those scenes in the film that show the man dominated by his mother, the cleaning lady, the dog, and all the people he interacts with the first time he walks the dog. The secondary theme, characterized by a lively, playful air, accompanies the scenes in the park and follows the story through scene 6. Here the music underscores the exhilarating turn of events the man begins

to experience. When his ruse is exposed, however, he becomes the same melancholy, disheartened man he was in the beginning, and the filmmaker employs the first musical theme to reinforce that outcome.

3) Ask your audience to look for particulary effective examples of visual images that portray the excitement and fulfilment individuals experience when they interact meaningfully. The filmmaker employs several examples of these types of images, composed carefully to emphasize the harmony and completeness people feel when they are together. Note that the filmmaker further emphasizes these images by contrasting them to other images of the main character alone on the street at different points in the film.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The film begins with several establishing shots of Paris, then focuses on one street, where we see a sad-looking man with a black coat and hat walking alone. When he reaches his apartment, he greets the cleaning lady, but before he can escape, she makes him wipe his feet on the mat.

2. Upstairs, he opens the door to his apartment and we see an old woman (his mother) feeding a little dog at the table. The dog snaps at him, and he closes the door. In the entry he smokes a cigarette furtively and jumps when he hears his mother call out. Inside, he begins eating, but she holds out the leash--it's time to walk the dog. The little dog, however, wants nothing to do with him and snaps at him several times.

3. Downstairs, the cleaning lady fondly pets the dog before the two set off. The walk is a near disaster for the little man. Because of the dog's restlessness and stubbornness, the two are almost run down by a motorist. Then the dog piddles on the wheel of a parked car, and when the motorist arrives and notices this, our man humbly bends to wipe off the wheel with his handkerchief. After a brief stop in a public park, the dog pulls him around a corner, where he collides with a young woman. Again he is yelled at for his carelessness. They come upon a quiet park, but when they approach the gate, a gendarme waves them away, pointing to the sign that says no one with a dog is allowed inside. On the way home, the little dog entwines its leash around that of a blind man's guide dog, and several people have to intervene to untangle the confusion. Exasperated, the man returns home.

4. But when he begins his meal, engaging in a little staring match with the dog on the side, he is interrupted again by his mother's insistent plea to take the dog for another walk. This time, however, he has an idea. In the entryway, he puts on dark glasses--voila! Now he is a king!

   Every scene in this walk is a repetition of the former encounters. But in every case he is treated with respect and consideration. When a driver has to stop her car as they cross an intersection, she reacts with fear; when the little dog piddles on a car's tire, the owner stands by--helpless; when the two bump into a woman on the sidewalk, a man comes along to upbraid her for being careless; when the two approach the quiet park, the gendarme sweeps open the gate and welcomes them. Inside the park our "blind" man and his dog join a few men on park benches for pleasant conversation.

5. Back home, the little dog no longer snaps at the man; now it waits patiently to be taken on another walk--to that quiet little park where people lavish attention on it. The next time they visit the park they are surrounded by people, and soon even children become part of the scene.

   Now when the man is at home, he is impatient to return to the park, and at every opportunity he dashes off with the dog--much to his mother's amazement. Each visit in the park is more joyous and convivial, until one visit when he shows the others how he became "blind". He spins a yarn about a fierce wartime engagement, when a mine exploded in his face. But he gets carried away in his pantomime and lets the leash slip away. Terrified by the noise, the little dog runs off.

6. The gendarme and another man help our "blind" man home. But when the cleaning lady spies this suspicious behavior, she concludes that the police are taking him home because he is drunk.

   Upstairs, we see the little dog has returned home safely. But before the man can say anything to his mother, the cleaning lady pushes him aside and whispers in the old woman's ear. Angry at his carelessness, the mother hands the little dog's leash over to her.

7. The man walks the streets alone. We see him slowly approach the familiar park, but he remains outside, looking through the trees at the men inside, who are conversing with each other as usual. But he can not go in. After thinking about his dilemma for a moment, he turns around and walks away.

--1974, CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 15 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What are some of the ways you could apply the main character's experience to your own concepts of the role that self-esteem and self-confidence play in developing relationships with others?

2. What are some of the ways the humor employed in the film enables the audience to more readily accept its serious message?

II. The Little Man and the Little Dog.

3. What was your first impression of the main character? What were some of his attitudes, behaviors, and reactions to other characters that developed his character?

4. In what ways was the little man dominated and/or intimidated by everyone around him?

5. What was the basis of the little man's relationship with his mother's dog? Why did the little man engage in a staring match with the dog in scene 4?

6. What did you expect would happen when the little man put on the dark glasses and pretended to be a blind man? Did the little man's reaction to his adventures as a "blind" man (scene 4) surprise you in any way?

7. How do you account for the little dog's change in behavior and his acceptance of the little man later in the film?

III. In the Park.

8. How are the scenes in the park different from earlier scenes? What values are suggested in those scenes?

9. Can you recall any specific images from the scenes in the park? What was your emotional response to those images? How would you characterize the little man's role as he related to the different people in the park?

10. Why does the relationship between the little man and the little dog change after they visit the park? Why didn't the little man tell his mother what was happening?

IV. Response to Loss.

11. In what way is the man responsible for his own downfall?

12. Why can't the man return to the park and rejoin his friends?

13. What is the filmmaker trying to communicate at the end of the film, showing the little man first standing just outside the park, looking inside at the crowd of former friends, and then walking away alone?

V. General Questions.

14. What does the film tell us about the way we treat people based on stereotypical attitudes?

15. What statement does the film make about the role of friendship in relationships, particularly as a means of enhancing the individual's self-esteem and self-confidence?

The Parting

INTRODUCTION

The response to loss depicted in this Yugoslavian film is the ritual that attends the death of a member of a community in a remote village in the countryside. The film provides viewers with a number of memorable images: a group of older women, dressed in black, gathering firewood; an old woman combing her luxuriant black hair; members of the community huddled inside a low building, participating in the funeral ceremony; the men clinking shot glasses together and drinking from them, then smoking quietly afterwards; the women reading tea leaves in the bottom of small cups; children playing around the funeral bier; men and women crying in pain at the gravesite; the rocky, desolate landscape around the village. The images and sounds in this film tell the entire story; any dialogue is secondary and meant to support the images. Viewers become intimately acquainted with this ritual of grief and mourning, following it from beginning to end.

Symbols of grief abound in the film: the subdued colors of the men and women's clothes, the gathering of mourners, the ceremonial cleansing of the corpse, the burning of the dead man's clothes, sounds of a funeral dirge, the distribution of flowers and gifts around the body, cries of grief and a chorus of mourners at the gravesite, and the tolling of a bell that concludes the ritual. The outpouring of emotion portrayed in the combination of images and sounds powerfully affects the audience, who can easily identify with the elements of this ritual.

Throughout the film the older members of the community perform a central role in carrying out the elements of the ritual. The first action in the film is an old woman gathering a few sticks of firewood. Soon she is joined by other women like herself, all dressed similarly and all bowed with age. Every scene is dominated by the presence of the old. Of all the people in the community they are the ones closest to death, they are the ones who know the elements of this ritual, and they will be the ones who pass on the knowledge of "the parting" to the younger members of the community. As if to emphasize the everpresent reality of death and the need for the continuity of tradition, the filmmaker begins and ends the film with images of the old, seated or standing motionless in doorways or behind windows of their stone buildings.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Explain to your audience that The Parting is a highly visual film experience, which utilizes powerful images to tell its story. Your audience should concentrate on reading those images in order to understand the substance of the story. Tell them that although the film is Yugoslavian, any dialogue will be secondary to the images; in other words, the absence of English subtitles in the film should not inhibit their ability to follow the narrative.

2) Ask your audience to discuss briefly some of the images of grief they are most familiar with. Consider making a list of those images. Then explain that this film provides a set of images your audience may not be entirely familiar with. After viewing the film, make another list of images and compare them with your earlier listing. NOTE: You could add a list of sounds associated with grief and/or mourning as well. Then ask your audience to listen for the unusual or unfamiliar sounds in the film that are associated with the ritual being depicted in the narrative.

3) Note that older people are portrayed in significant roles throughout the film. Ask your audience to watch for images of older people in various settings and engaged in many actions that are central to the narrative. Ask them to consider what the filmmaker is trying to convey about the role of older people in this story.

4) Ask if anyone in your audience is familiar with a ritual associated with the response to death in a cultural setting unlike their own. Ask that person to share briefly what he or she knows about the elements of that ritual. In what ways are they similar to and/or different from their own culture? When your audience views the film, ask them to keep in mind this information and note comparisons in the action being portrayed.

5) Note that the film depicts a ritual associated with the response to death that people in the audience may find unfamiliar and may make some members of the audience feel uncomfortable. If some members of the audience believe the film may stimulate strong emotional responses associated with losses they have experienced in their own lives, they may prefer not to view the film.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. The film begins with six static shots, like photographs, carefully composed, each showing a single motionless person seated behind a doorway or window of a stone building. The continuous sound of flies buzzing can be heard in the background.
   The first movement is that of an old woman, wearing a long black dress, a few sticks of firewood in her hand. Her back is stooped, and she uses a cane to move about. We hear the sound of the cane hitting the rocky ground. More images follow of old people, waiting, silent, watchful.

2. Suddenly a harsh scraping sound catches the attention of one of the people. As he looks up, we see a hand moving across the screen, then realize that the image is that of someone combing dark, luxuriant black hair. Then the woman parts her hair, and we see her ancient, weathered face. She looks toward us, silent, and each time she pulls the comb through her hair, the same harsh, scraping sound is magnified.
   An exterior scene follows, showing various women, all dressed in black,

walking quickly over a path. We hear their footsteps. More and more come together until about eight or nine are marching with hurried steps.

3. An interior scene, showing an old woman we saw earlier seated on the floor inside a dark enclosure. Children and other adults look on, as if waiting.

   Two men begin to undress someone. At first we can't see who is being undressed. They remove the clothes quickly. Then we glimpse the body of a dead person, an old man. The ragged clothes are held up. Note the earth-tone colors. The two men throw the clothes onto a bonfire set in the enclosure. As the fire burns brightly, we see reactions of those watching. All are motionless, except one nervous young man. Most of the faces are set against a dark background that highlights their expressions.

4. We hear the loud clinking of glasses, then see men drinking from small glasses. Several men smoke. All are quiet.

   We see the corpse being washed. The body lies face down, while liquid is splashed over the back and rubbed vigorously. A young girl, fascinated by this activity, watches the scene.

   As the body is covered with a colorful cloth, we hear the sound of women humming a dirge. The people crowded inside the enclosure watch quietly. Then a fine silk sash, colored with orange and blue bands, is wrapped around the body. The dirge is hummed louder.

   Someone takes a picture of the assembled community. An older woman, probably the man's wife, sits at the body's side.

   Women pass one at a time to stop and kiss the forehead of the dead man. We hear more clinking of glasses in the background. No one talks. The old woman leaves her place by the side of the body. We see flowers and other gifts around the body.

5. We hear whispering, then see an extreme closeup of leaves in the bottom of tea cups, although at first it is difficult to decipher the content of this image. The closeups focus on the different patterns made by the leaves. Cups are passed around and examined closely. The whispering grows louder.

   Conversations begin and become loud, as we see two little boys chase each other around the body. We see some smiles and hear laughter and more conversation. All is animated now, and the people appear to be relaxed.

6. Suddenly an abrupt change: we hear a man's voice singing loudly, almost shouting, as if to gather the people. Everyone stops talking and listens intently. We begin to see people outside. They are in the cemetery, standing around the monuments. We see many images of men and women grieving as we hear a lament being wailed by a chorus of women. The song continues as we see more individual shots of men and women crying.

   A bell begins to toll, and after more images of grief, we hear the man's voice singing loudly again. A closeup of an old woman seated in a doorway. She is motionless, her hands supporting her head. The camera moves back. We see two shots of people seated in doorways. Then we see a long shot of the rocky, desolate landscape.

--1973, Wombat Productions, 16 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. How would you define the overall mood of this film? Do you think the mood was appropriate for the subject matter being considered? How did that mood affect your own response to the film?

2. When did you first realize what was happening in the film? Why was the subject matter revealed in that way?

II. Images and Sounds.

3. After viewing this film, what images stand out in your memory? What feelings did those images evoke as you viewed the film?

4. After viewing this film, what sounds do you recall most vividly? What feelings did those sounds evoke as you viewed the film?

5. What range of colors were used throughout the film? How did that use of color affect your response to the action in the film?

6. Can you recall any sounds in the film that seemed to be louder than usual? Why were those sounds magnified?

III. The Ritual.

7. How would you define the various stages of the ritual? How were those stages clearly distinguished from each other? Did you notice any movements, sounds, or other signals that served to separate the various stages?

8. Did you notice any relationship between the stages of the ritual and the stages of grief as they were experienced by the people in the film?

9. What roles were assumed by various people in carrying out this ritual? What do you think was the purpose of those roles?

10. What role did older people play in carrying out the elements of the ritual?

11. In several scenes we see young people observing elements of the ritual. What do you think they gained from this experience?

12. How did participation in this ritual effect the various people in the film?

IV. General Questions.

13. Why does the film end almost in the same way that it begins?

14. Why did the filmmaker choose to title this film The Parting?

15. What can this film teach us about the experience of grief in our lives?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Imagine that you are an unbiased, outside observer who is able to view the ritual as it unfolds in this film. As you view the film, make note of what you consider to be the constituents of that ritual, paying close attention to the actions, sounds, physical environment, and interaction of people. Then consider the following questions as they relate to that ritual.

1) Identify what you think is the meaning of each element of the overall ritual. (If you are not sure, make note of your uncertainty and ask for help later in discussion.)

2) What similarities/differences did you notice in male/female roles as they were associated with elements of the ritual?

3) To what extent did each element of the ritual play a part in educating young people and others in the community about the significance of the ritual?

4) Viewing the ritual as a whole, what purpose do you think it played in the entire life of the community?

Elements of the Ritual

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

INTRODUCTION

This film tells a simple story of two older friends who live in New South Wales, Australia. The character of the two men is revealed through gentle touches that emphasize their idiosyncracies and individuality. Jack is a talker, a plotter who loves to engage life with a ready wit and good humor. One of his favorite sayings is "piece of cake," which represents his sunny attitude toward life's challenges, whether it be stealing a goose for a Christmas dinner, wheedling some free advice from the local vet, or talking his way out of a robbery charge in court before a magistrate. His best friend is Bert, a tall, distinguished-looking man, whose white hair is always neatly combed. Bert is Jack's foil and reluctant accomplice, a quiet, proper gentleman, a bit of a worrier.

Yet these men of differing temperaments and personalities share a meaningful friendship that goes beyond mere companionship. In the course of the film their friendship survives a profound trial that occurs because of Jack's painful grief after his daughter's death and the subsequent fantasy he spins to deny the reality of the loss. For despite his cocky exterior, Jack is a fragile, vulnerable person. Although his daughter died more than five years ago, as Christmas nears Jack's fond memories of times spent with his daughter and her family stimulate the fantasy that she never died after all, and that one day she will walk through his gate and say, "There you are, Dad."

Faced with evidence of this psychological pain, Bert does not abandon Jack. Instead, he stays by his side, even committing an act of petty larceny along the way, until he is able to find the right moment to confront Jack with the truth about his daughter's death. The resolution of Jack's pain, although it may be only a temporary relief, provides a touching conclusion to the story, which conveys in realistic terms some of the effects of grief in a personal experience.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Tell your audience that the film depicts the relationships between two unique characters, men who live alone but are close friends. Your audience may want to consider the topic of male friendships in older age: what is the basis of male relationships? how do men help each other respond to emotional losses? how can male friendships be stimulated and encouraged? Note that the film addresses these questions in its portrayal of the relationship between two friends, Jack and Bert.

2) Note that the film is made in Australia by Australian filmmakers. Ask your audience what they expect to see based on this information: how will the setting and/or the environment differ? What types of characters will they expect to see? Ask your audience if anyone has visited or is familiar with Australia, particularly New South Wales, the setting for this

film. After viewing the film, you may want to consider some of the "universal" characteristics of aging that are portrayed in the film, despite the variable of an unusual setting.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Two older men walking slowly down a road, then across fields and into town. The taller of the two is distinguished looking and carries himself like a gentleman; the shorter of the two, Jack, is dressed in well-worn clothes, and he holds a pocket radio to his ear, listening to the races. In town they enter a grocery store, and Jack tells the clerk, "I'd like to order a goose for my daughter. It's got to be the best you've got!" She looks surprised at his request. She tells him he already owes $108, so she refuses any more credit. He gives her a whimsical look and says, "Is that a fact? My goodness, it mounts up!" He tells her he's getting a legacy soon anyway, so it doesn't matter. After he leaves, Bert steps up to buy a paper, and the clerk says, "I thought his daughter was dead." But Bert says, "Oh, no."

   Outside, Jack plays a joke on Bert by sitting in someone else's car and then calling out to him when Bert can't figure out where he is. Bert seems upset, but Jack assures him, "I know the owner!"

   They stand at the top of a hill out in the country before going their separate ways. When Bert asks Jack about that legacy he mentioned in the store, Jack says, "Who knows?" Then Bert asks, "And your daughter?" But Jack assures him that she is coming home for Christmas.

2. At night in Jack's house. He is preparing some tea in his crowded, messy kitchen. Bert stops in and sits quietly for a moment before Jack offers, "Oh, you don't want to do it. That's okay. It's to help me, Bert. I haven't seen them for six years and they're coming all the way from Hong Kong." Bert seems troubled by something, and he tries to change Jack's mind about this Christmas dinner for his daughter, but Jack won't be persuaded. He reads a letter from his daughter, who refers to her visit to Australia to see her father for Christmas. Then he takes down framed photographs of his daughter, including his favorite picture, her wedding portrait. This isn't the first time he has shown the pictures to Bert, and as the two men sit on the sofa, Jack speaks fondly of his daughter. "You'll never know how much I miss her." Then he adds, "What I wouldn't give to have her living around the corner." We see a closeup of his face, concentrating on memories of his daughter.

   Bert insists that he can not go along with Jack's plan to steal a goose. But Jack says, "It's a challenge! It's a bit of excitement!" Finally, Bert agrees to help, but he reminds Jack that he's never stolen anything in his life. Jack says confidently, "Piece of cake."

3. The two cohorts make their way past a farmhouse in the middle of the night, then approach a large holding pen. Inside is a large flock of white ducks.

Bert whispers, "They're ducks--not geese!" But that doesn't stop Jack. He grabs one of the ducks and they put it in a sack.

The next morning Jack shows Bert his prize, which he keeps in a small pen behind the house. He's already given the duck a name--Molly.

4. The next day Jack prepares some breakfast cereal in a bowl with milk, but the duck isn't interested in eating any of it, despite Jack's entreaties.

   Then we see both men sitting in Jack's kitchen. The center of their attention is Molly, whose head is just sticking out above the top of the cardboard box Jack has put her in. She hasn't eaten in four days. They try to think of some food she might like. For now Jack decides to keep her in the house, where it is "a bit cozier."

5. A nervous Jack appears at Bert's house. He thinks the duck needs to see the vet. Bert joins him and they leave for town. As they walk away, Bert complains, "We can't afford a vet!"

   Jack enters a bar in town and sits next to a well-dressed man at the counter, who is enjoying a beer and talking to a friend. Jack orders a drink, and when he is served he suddenly turns to the man--who just happens to be the vet--and strikes up a conversation. "I have a friend who has a sick duck. And I said to him if I could find the vet he'd give a piece of advice. . . do you come in here often?" The vet appears to be uncomfortable at Jack's forthright conversation, but Jack carries the day.

   Outside the bar, Bert is waiting. Jack tells him the vet said Molly was "pining away" and needed company. Both men take the vet's advice literally.

6. Back to the flock of geese at night for another raid. But this time the owner catches the two inside the goose pen.

   At the police station, an impatient sargent repeats the charges against the two men. Bert looks gloomy and fearful of this authority figure, but Jack's eyes shine brightly as he takes in every word the sargent says. Jack is fascinated by the experience. He does all the talking. The sargent waives their bail because both have lived in this part of Australia for more than twenty years, but he reminds them to appear in court.

   At Jack's house, Bert sits on the sofa looking depressed. Jack tries to cheer him up, then advises him to stay the night. In a moment he comes back in to announce that Molly ate all of her food for the first time. Then he starts to dance about the room holding his duck. Bert joins in the fun, laughing along with Jack. When Jack asks Bert to give Molly a kiss, at first he grumbles about it, but then he submits, and gives the duck a quick peck. Both men smile and laugh.

7. A somber magistrate addresses the two in court. Jack does all the talking, and he spins a tale about finding a duck on the road and then returning it to the pen. The magistrate asks a few probing questions, but Jack handles them with great vigor and imagination. Finally, the magistrate admits there is no evidence against the two, so he dismisses the case. Jack is solicitous, obedient, and humble in the presence of the magistrate, but when he and Bert turn to leave, we hear Jack whisper, "Piece of cake."

8. The two return from town to Jack's place, another long walk. Bert admits that he was worried, but Jack says, "You're a born worrier." He is more interested in planning the big Christmas dinner for his daughter. Jack goes into the cage and picks up Molly, cooing at her and stroking her fondly.

But when Jack continues to fantasize about preparations for the Christmas feast, Bert cuts him off and orders him to sit down for a moment. He tells Jack, "You're my best friend. My only friend these days." Then he says sternly, "I can't play along with your fantasies any longer." Jack sits quietly, while Bert continues, "You have to come to your senses and face up to the fact that your daughter is dead." Jack cries, "She's not dead!" He tries to persuade himself that her death is a lie, and he accuses his son-in-law of telling his daughter that he (Jack) is dead. That's why she hasn't come to see him. "She's going to walk through that gate one day and say, 'There you are, Dad.'"

But Bert persists. He asks, "Where's your daughter's letter?" Jack takes it slowly from his coat pocket. "Open it." Jack is quiet, his mouth tight, grim. "When was it written?" He stares at the letter. "The date, Jack!" He tries to say it: "December 1, 19--" Bert finishes it for him--"She's been dead for over five years. She's not coming back. You have to face up to that fact." Jack sits quietly for a moment, thinking. Then he says, "You're right, you know," Jack begins to stand up, and Bert touches him gently on the back. Jack goes over to Molly, picks her up, and sits down next to Bert again. He puts his head down by the duck and holds the animal close to him. Jack cocks a mischievous eye toward Bert and says, "I never liked roast duck anyway!"

--1980, Learning Corporation of America,
24 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What feelings were you left with at the end of this film? Would you say this film had a "happy ending?"
2. In what ways was the friendship between Jack and Bert the crucial ingredient in this film?
3. How was the filmmaker able to use the following to individualize the two characters and to make them believable to the audience: sense of humor, dress, accent, temperament.

II. Jack and Bert: Two Friends.

4. What was your first impression of the two characters, Jack and Bert? At what point in the film did that early impression begin to change?

5. How would you characterize Jack and Bert's relationship? What do you think sustains their relationship?

6. Late in the film Bert tells Jack, "You're my best friend." What evidence of their friendship did you see in the film?

7. Did you believe the veterinarian's diagnosis regarding Molly the duck? What did Jack and Bert's response to the vet's advice reveal about them?

8. Which scene in the film do you think communicated most clearly the close relationship that existed between Jack and Bert?

III. Jack and Bert: Dealing With Jack's Fantasy.

9. When did you first realize that Jack's daughter was actually dead? What do you think were some of the reasons Jack needed to believe she was still alive?

10. What was the purpose of the scene in which Jack showed Bert the framed photographs of his daughter, including her wedding picture?

11. Can you explain why Bert went along with Jack's fantasy?

12. What made Bert decide to put a stop to Jack's fantasy? Why did Jack finally listen to reason?

13. How did you react to the resolution of Jack's fantasy at the end of the film? Do you think Jack's feelings of grief are resolved for good?

IV. Old Age and Fantasy.

14. What do you think was the source of Jack's fantasy?

15. What do you think the film is trying to communicate about the role of fantasy in old age?

16. Do you think Jack is in need of further therapy at the end of the film? What therapy would be most helpful to him at this point?

V. General Questions.

17. How did you react when you learned that Jack had named the duck Molly? Why is that a significant detail?

18. Although the film takes place in Australia, do you think it has a universal application in its story and message?

19. What does the film communicate about the basis of the relationships between older people and figures of authority?

20. By viewing this film, what can we learn about the long-term effects of grief?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

When Jack announces his intention to steal a duck for a Christmas dinner, he tells his friend Bert, "It's a challenge! It's a bit of excitement!" Note the following scenes in the film that show the two men interacting with the duck. In each case, consider the questions below:

a) what does the action in the scene reveal about Jack's emotional needs as well as his ability to respond emotionally to someone else?

b) what does the action in the scene reveal about the basis of Jack and Bert's friendship?

c) what role does the duck play in helping Jack recover from his emotional loss?

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1) The morning after the two men steal the duck, Jack shows Bert a small holding pen he has constructed for the animal (scene 3).

2) That same morning Jack announces that he has named the duck "Molly."

3) When Molly refuses to eat for a few days, we see the two men (scene 4) sitting in Jack's kitchen, Molly standing in a cardboard box on the table, her head just sticking out above the top of the open box. The two friends discuss possible foods that will appeal to her, and Jack strokes her head gently.

4) Jack appears at Bert's door soon after, concerned that the duck still refuses to eat. He insists on their seeing a veterinarian.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE . . .

5) Jack sneaks a conversation with the vet in a neighborhood bar. Later, he tells Bert the vet's response: Molly is pining away and needs company. The next scene shows the two men in the farmer's yard again, trying to steal another duck.

6) The night the two men are arrested we see them at Jack's house (scene 6). Bert is despondent, and Jack asks him to stay the night. When he discovers that Molly is eating, he carries her into the living room, dances around with her in his arms, and has Bert give her a kiss.

7) When Bert helps Jack recover from his grief, we see Jack holding Molly close to his face, a thoughtful expression in his eyes. Then he cocks a mischievous eye toward Bert and says, "I never liked roast duck anyway!"

INTRODUCTION

The two characters in this film, Karl and Margot, share tragic pasts, and now are faced with the ongoing need to reintegrate their lives in some meaningful way so that, as Margot says, they can "stay in touch with one's memory and still remain involved in life now." Because he was half-Jewish, Karl faced persecution from the Nazis in Germany before World War II. Karl knew that his wife, who was not Jewish, and who was not considered a political enemy of the regime, would be safe there, so he left her and his family behind and came to America. Now forty years have passed, and still he is haunted by the memory of his decision to leave his wife and family. Recently he has met Margot, a widow, and another immigrant from Germany. She often invites him to her apartment for tea, and while there he reads to her from his book of memoirs. She listens patiently and encourages him when he feels depressed.

Margot, too, has a past shrouded in private sadness. When she and her husband left Germany, she recalls the crowded boat and the common bond she felt with all the refugees: "Here we were. . . everything taken from us." But that is the only memory Margot shares in the film. Unlike Karl, who is in her words "lost in the past," Margot is an active, vital person who is aware of her environment and is a participant in life in the present. We see evidence of her ability to engage life as her relationship with Karl continues and she seeks to deepen their intimacy in order "to share what we have now." But Karl is unable to forge new bonds with another person. He leaves New York for a "retirement" community while Margot stays on to start her life over again.

Actually, the film is about Margot's inner life more than it is about Karl's. We seldom see Karl alone, and when we do, we hear Margot's voice commenting on their relationship. We see Margot alone in her apartment or at work several times in the film, and each time we learn more about her emotional condition and psychological state of mind.

Margot faces another crisis in the film apart from her relationship with Karl. She is an accountant, and her job means a great deal to her. When her employer takes away one of her accounts, because, as he says, "It was getting to be too much for you," she is stunned and momentarily loses her direction. In a poignant scene alone in her apartment, we see her face some of the realities of aging as it impacts on her own experience. But Margot maintains her sense of balance when she remembers that this city of immigrants "is a place to start over." She admits, "It can knock you down. It has knocked me down a few times." But as before, Margot gets back up and continues to live.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Explain that the film portrays the relationship between two older people, Margot and Karl, who face losses from their pasts in different ways. Note that viewers will be given an opportunity to identify with Margot

throughout the film. In fact, they may want to discuss how their response to the film is affected by the presence of Margot's point of view in several key scenes.

2) Prepare viewers for the psychological depth and richness of the film by reading the following passage. Note that the passage refers to the experiences of an older person who feels the impending loneliness of old age and the fear of being associated with a class of people who are considered lost and cut off from others:

-- What people I met every day--fragments on whom the old pain still lay, under which they were still living, slow as tortoises. All those men and women, who are in some transition, all with something infinitely fine in their faces, only a little bit troubled and uneasy. Their expressions could be made clear again if someone would look and help. But there is no one to help those who are a little perplexed, frightened, and intimidated. I often had to say aloud that I was not one of them. Yet I was frightened, and felt that I would belong to the lost if someone looked at me and counted me with them.

Ask your audience to discuss what they consider to be the meaning of this passage. What is the speaker afraid of? How is the process of aging characterized in this passage? NOTE: This passage is spoken by the main character in A Private Life in a moment of personal crisis. You may want to prepare your audience for this scene, or you may choose to let them experience the scene without their being forewarned.

3) The film provides several examples of innovative film techniques in order to help viewers identify with the main character, Margot:

-- When Margot loses one of her accounts because her boss thinks she can not handle the heavy load, her depression is underscored by a quiet scene showing her in her apartment, curled up in her chair, reading one of her favorite books (see number 2 above). As she reads the passage, we see scenes of many old people on the street, walking aimlessly, sitting alone on benches. Combined with these images are scenes showing Margot walking alone, a fearful look on her face. Here the editing reveals the depth of her personal crisis, as we see her fear of being cast aside because she is growing older through the visual information provided in the scenes.

-- In scene 6 we see Margot running errands. This visual information is complemented by her dialogue (done in the voiceover technique). She thinks aloud about the rigors of living in New York City. She calls it "a place to start over. It can knock you down. It has knocked me down a few times." But throughout the film Margot shows viewers her strength of character, always working to improve herself and to live fully in the present. Obviously she possesses the determination to overcome the barriers of isolation and loss.

-- At the end of the film (scene 9) the filmmaker again portrays Margot commenting on her experiences. We see her after she returns to her apartment after saying goodbye to Karl. The emptiness of her rooms reflects the depression she is feeling. Her words address her sense of emotional loss: "We must be archeologists of our own lives. We dig ourselves out of the years. . . much for the dust others have thrown on us." As we listen to her words, we see pictures on the walls of her rooms, then focus on one picture--showing a young girl (Margot) holding up a piece of driftwood as she stands in the water on a beach, her parents watching her. This visual image of Margot's youthful gaiety and independence reminds viewers that despite the compromises and failed relationships of the her experiences, Margot will perservere and overcome her loss.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. An older couple, Margot and Karl, walking on a New York city street. In the background we hear piano music, then Margot's voice, as she shares her thoughts: "I have had such high hopes for Karl and me." We learn that Margot is a widow and formerly an editor in Germany. Karl, a man she says is "lost in his past," likes to read to her from his memoirs.

2. In her apartment, Margot exercises, then does household chores as she recites Portuguese from a foreign-language record. She sees Karl on the street below her window.

   Upstairs they converse, and we hear her say, "Karl would comment on the passing of things, and I would serve him tea. He would read from his memoir book. It was his obsession." He recalls 1931, when he was an apprentice to an architect. He recounts the growing power of Naziism in Germany. As she listens, we hear her thoughts: "But one can stay in touch with one's memory and still remain involved with life now."

3. Margot at work in her office, where she is an accountant. She is happy there, she says. Later we see her with Karl again, this time in a public square, sharing a lunch. Karl begins to read from his memoirs. We hear her voice: "He has never gotten over his leaving Germany. He had a wife and children." He recalls Hitler's rise to power, then says, "I never should have left. I feel we could have done something. Why didn't I stay?" He is depressed for a moment, but she cheers him up.

4. Margot at work late in her office. Her boss stops in to say good night, but also tells her that another accountant will complete the project she was working on. "It was getting to be too much for you," he says. She looks stunned.

   At home, she takes out a book, sits down wearily, and begins to read. As she does, we see scenes of many old people on the street, walking aimlessly, sitting alone on benches, all with lonely expressions on their faces. Combined with these images are scenes showing Margot walking alone, a fearful look on her face. The last image in this combination is of an old woman, bowed with age, walking down the street alone, carrying two well-worn shopping bags under her arms. We hear Margot reading from the book:

> What people I met every day--fragments on whom the old pain still lay, under which they were still living, slow as tortoises. All those men and women, who are in some transition, all with something infinitely fine in their faces, only a little bit troubled and uneasy. Their expressions could be made clear again if someone would look and help. But there is no one to help those who are a little perplexed, frightened, and intimidated. I often had to say aloud that I was not one of them. Yet I was frightened, and felt that I would belong to the lost if someone looked at me and counted me with them.

5. Back to her apartment, where she quietly prepares a meal, then returns to the street, riding her bicycle.

   Later, she and Karl are in a park. As she knits, he plays solitaire. He reads again, this time about his wife in Germany. Margot recalls the time she left Europe. "Here we were, a boat full of people, everything taken from us." She apologizes for sharing this sad memory, and he returns to his reading, recalling a time when Jews were forbidden to work. Because he was part-Jewish, that policy applied to him. He reads, "I could not leave Anna (his wife), my home, my craft, and survive. A tie was broken. It was like I had left my life behind."

6. They leave the park, but not before watching a group of young people practicing European folk dances. A brief interlude follows, showing Margot running errands, as we hear her thoughts: "New York is a place to start over. It can knock you down. It has knocked me down a few times."

   Margot preparing for Karl's next visit. She applies make-up, and we see on the wall of her bedroom old photographs of her as a young woman, including a picture of Margot and her husband as a young couple. Karl arrives for tea, and soon he is busy playing solitaire on the coffee table. She turns to him. "I have been thinking--" She hesitates, then starts again. "Our visits mean so much to me." "Oh, to me, too," he says, not even looking up. Without skipping a beat, she sets out the dessert, but we can't miss the downcast look on her face. He continues playing cards.

7. Karl on the sidewalk, looking somber. We hear Margot's voice: "I understand Karl's fear. I have been torn from my roots, too, but I wanted to share what we have now." She continues, "Sometimes I think men avoid closeness for fear of being stuck. But I think Karl is a little stuck already."

   We see Margot in her apartment. Karl has brought her some flowers. Then he announces that he is moving to Ohio to live in a retirement community near his son. She is stunned, but she recovers quickly. "Shall I read as always?" She nods dumbly. As he reads his words ironically comment on their relationship: he refers to the time he left his wife, who stayed behind because she had no reason to leave, since she was not an enemy of the Nazis. "What could I offer her? I had no future to offer her." We focus on Margot, feeling the pain of each word. Then we hear her thoughts: "Oh, my God. It has happened. Don't say anything." Karl closes his eyes after wiping his glasses. His head drops, as if he has momentarily fallen asleep. Margot struggles to speak: "Karl, I care for you so. I had almost come to hope--" Then she stops. Karl looks up and asks if she said something. She shakes her head, her hands folded in her lap. He goes back to reading.

8. The day of Karl's departure. Out on the street, Margot flags a cab for him. Karl sits in the back of the cab. Margot hands him his umbrella and says, "Have a good trip, Karl, I'll miss you." He looks up at her from the open window. "Perhaps I'll send my memoirs when I'm finished," he says. She smiles bravely. He looks up at her, stunned by what he sees in her expression. The cab drives away.

9. Alone in her apartment, she goes from room to room, turning on the lights. We hear her thoughts: "We must be archeologists of our own lives. We dig ourselves out of the years. . . much for the dust others have thrown on us." She looks at the pictures on the wall. We focus on one--showing a young girl holding up a piece of driftwood as she stands in the water on a beach, her parents watching.

--1980, New York Museum of Modern Art,
30 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What do you think the filmmaker was trying to accomplish by having Margot "tell" much of the story, often as we saw scenes of Karl and Margot together or of Margot alone?

2. Early in the film Margot says, "One can stay in touch with one's memory and still remain involved with life in the now." To what extent did Margot and Karl succeed in living that philosophy of life?

3. As you watched the film, when did you begin to feel involved in Karl and Margot's relationship? How did you think the relationship was going to turn out? Did you ever want the relationship to become more serious and long-lasting?

4. What are some of the ways Margot's outlook on life differs significantly from Karl's? Did you notice any evidence in the film that would account for that difference?

II. Margot's World.

5. What was your impression of Margot when you saw her alone in her apartment for the first time? (Scene 2) Can you recall any of her actions in that scene? What did her actions reveal about her character or outlook on life?

6. What do you think Margot's job as an accountant meant to her?

7. Can you summarize the crisis Margot faces when her employer tells her that he is taking away one of her accounts because "it was getting to be too much for you"? What does she learn about herself in the following scene? (Scene 4).

III. Private Lives.

8. Why did Karl leave Germany? Do you have any idea why Margot left Germany?

9. What do we never really learn about the two characters in the film? What do you think the filmmaker is trying to convey by not giving the audience more background information about the two characters?

10. What are some of the "secrets" about her life and experience Margot never shared with Karl? Why didn't she tell him?

11. In the last scene of the film Margot says, "We must be archeologists of our own lives. We dig ourselves out of the years . . . much for the dust others have thrown on us." What do you think she means by this statement?

12. What do you think is meant by the film's title, A Private Life? To what extent is that title appropriate to the experiences of both the main characters?

IV. Karl and Margot's Relationship.

13. How do you think Karl would have defined the basis of his relationship with Margot throughout most of the film?

14. Did you ever feel that Karl avoided establishing a closer relationship with Margot? Why did Margot want to establish a closer relationship Karl?

15. Late in the film, when Karl comes for tea, Margot begins to speak. "I have been thinking--" Then she starts over, "Our visits mean so much to me." What do you think she meant to say?

16. Do you recall any scenes in which Karl failed to notice non-verbal signals from Margot regarding the basis of their relationship?

17. What did the two characters gain through their involvement with each other? Did either of them lose anything because of that involvement?

18. When Karl and Margot are saying good-bye, Margot says, "I'll miss you." Karl tells her he will send her a copy of his memoirs, and she nods bravely. But Karl looks stunned for a moment, as if he has seen something in her expression. What do you think the filmmaker meant to convey by Karl's expression at that moment?

19. What do you think were the reasons behind Karl's decision to move to Ohio and live near his son?

20. What do you think Margot's life will be like after Karl leaves? Did the film provide any clues as to how she will react to the loss of this relationship?

V. Karl's Last Visit (Scene 7).

21. When Karl tells Margot he is leaving for Ohio, he reads again from his memoirs about the time he left Germany, leaving his wife and family behind. He reads, "What could I offer her? I had no future to offer her." Can you recall Margot's reaction at that point? What do you think she was feeling at that moment?

22. In the same scene she begins to speak. "Oh, Karl, I care for you so. I had almost come to hope--" But Karl doesn't hear her words. What do you think she intended to say? Why didn't she complete her statement or repeat her words when he asked her if she had spoken?

VI. General Questions.

23. Which scene in the film did you think represented the "turning point" in their relationship? What do you think made it so?

24. Which of these two characters had the more effective listening skills? What role did "listening" play in their relationship?

25. Can you recall how the film ended? (The last image showed two adults and a child on the beach.) Who do you think the little girl was meant to represent? Why was this image an appropriate one to end the film?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

All of the questions on this sheet refer to one scene in the film, which begins when Margot returns home from work, takes a book down from the shelf, wraps an afghan around her shoulders, sits in a chair under a lamp, and begins to read. Take a moment to read over these questions before the film begins. Try to keep them in mind as you view the film. Afterwards, you will have an opportunity to respond to these questions and participate in discussion.

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1. How would you characterize Margot's emotional state as it is portrayed in this scene? What action has triggered this response on her part?

2. Margot notes that she has not looked at this particular book for many years. What do you think makes her choose this particular book on this specific occasion?

3. When she begins to read, we see a series of images of older persons, almost always alone, living out their everyday existences. What images of aging are conveyed in this scene?

4. Here is the passage Margot reads from the book:

> What people I met every day--fragments on whom the old pain still lay, under which they were still living, slow as tortoises. All those people, men and women, who are in some transition, all with something infinitely fine in their faces, only a little bit troubled and uneasy. Their expressions could certainly be made clear again if someone would look and help. But there is no one to help those who are a little perplexed, frightened, and intimidated. I often had to say aloud that I was not one of them. Yet I was frightened, and I felt that I would belong to the lost if someone looked at me and counted me with them.

When you compare the images you saw with the ideas embodied in the passage above, what do you feel is the overall impact of this scene? What do we learn about Margot in this scene?

RECOMMENDED AUDIENCES:

NAME OF FILM:	pre-school	elementary	junior high	senior high	college	adults	older adults
Dying: Sally					x	x	x
Dying: Harriet & Bill					x	x	x
For Gentlemen Only				x	x	x	x
Grieving: . . . Alone				x	x	x	x
The Mailbox			x	x	x	x	x
Martin the Cobbler		x	x	x	x	x	x
One-Eyed Men / Kings				x	x	x	x
The Parting					x	x	x
Piece of Cake			x	x	x	x	x
A Private Life					x	x	x

SUBJECT AREAS	Dying: Sally	Dying: Harriet/Bill	For Gentlmen Only	Grieving: Alone	The Mailbox	Martin the Cobbler	One-Eyed Men/Kings	The Parting	Piece of Cake	A Private Life
ageism: dispel myths	x		x	x		x				x
counseling/psychology	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x
creativity and aging	x		x		x	x				x
death/grief education	x	x		x		x		x	x	
ethical issues		x	x		x		x		x	
family relationships		x		x	x					
film study/film art	x	x			x	x	x	x		x
folklore/culture						x	x	x	x	x
friendships			x	x		x	x		x	
intergenerational		x			x	x		x		
life review	x		x	x	x	x				x
loneliness of old age			x		x	x	x		x	x
long-term health care	x				x					
men's roles		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
mental health progr.		x	x			x	x		x	
retirement concerns			x		x				x	x
religious education	x				x	x		x		
stereotypes of aging			x	x	x	x				
urban aging			x				x			x
values education	x	x	x		x	x			x	x
women's roles	x	x		x	x			x		x

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED FILMS

The Final Proud Days of Elsie Wurster
Pennsylvania State Univ. Audiovisual Services, 1974, 58 min., b & w

This film is the sensitive chronicle of the physical decline of Elsie Wurster, a resident in a nursing home. Although the technical merits of the film are unexceptional when compared to a film like Dying, the straightforward narrative recreates the efforts of the nursing home staff to make Elsie's last days complete and fulfilled. The emphasis here is on the "proud days" of Elsie Wurster. As the film's narrator says, "She was what most of us hope never to be--old and sick. But she had good treatment, good friends, and great courage." At first uncomfortable with the intrusive camera documenting her story, Elsie begins to relax in time and even kid the camera crew. After her condition begins to deteriorate, we see her sitting up in bed, dunking a doughnut in her coffee: "I like to dunk. I still kind of think I'm going to make it though. I don't know." At one point she tells the crew about some of the women in their 80's and 90's who live in the nursing home: "Boy, some of them live to be old here." Later, when she gets her hair washed and set, she looks in the mirror and says, "I guess that's all right for an old lady!" We view her decline over the period of about two months in the nursing home, and in the end she dies--on Christmas morning. One of the nurses notes, "She told the girls Christmas morning was the day she was going to die. She had a big smile on her face and thanked them for the gifts. . . ."

Throughout the film we follow the course of her physical treatment: we see several staff meetings, a utilization review committee meeting, physical therapy sessions, and nurses interacting with her at her bedside. Although the film is somewhat lengthy for use in workshops and inservices, it represents an objective, well-documented study of the impact of the health-care delivery system on the elderly.

Golden Age
University of Southern California, School of Cinema-Television, 1980
20 min.

This film is one of three films, produced by the University of Southern California, which addresses a topic related to aging. Journey's End (1979) explores the need to plan estates so that the shock associated with the death of a loved one is not magnified by financial constraints. Grieving: Suddenly Alone (1982: see Chapter Four) portrays the diverse effects of grief on a woman whose husband has died. In Golden Age the emphasis is on the fears older people attach to living in a nursing home. The main character, Selma, reluctantly agrees to be placed in a nursing home when her children are forced to move away because of the demands of a new job. She is terrified of institutionalized living, even though the staff, administrator, and residents of the small nursing home welcome her and try to provide emotional support. Selma is determined to resist any emotional ties to the other residents. But when one of the residents dies suddenly, Selma realizes that life must go on, and that a person's chances for fulfilment depend to a great extent on one's ability to seize opportunities to form emotional commitments.

Although the film addresses an important topic of interest to health-care professionals and educators, many of the scenes try too hard to make specific points about the anxieties and fears older people confront when they become residents of nursing homes. The characterizations are pleasant, but superficial at best, and to some extent the film relies too heavily on the message that older people need love interests in order to be fulfilled. Unlike Grieving: Suddenly Alone, this film lacks the richness of well-defined and consistent scenes that reveal the ambiguity and ambivalence of human behavior when faced with emotional stress.

How Could I Not Be Among You?

Eccentric Circle Workshop, 1973, 28 min., b & w

When Ted Rosenthal contracted leukemia, he recalls, "I called up countless people and said, 'Guess what's happened to me!' And everybody came over and kissed me and loved me and hugged me. But there was this undercurrent of sinking despair underneath it all. I was scared." His willingness to face his illness honestly--and sometimes irreverently--is the basis of this film portrait. Rosenthal was a poet, and the film is suffused with the imagery and rhythms of his poetry as well as the straightforward narrative of the course of his illness. Sometimes the film technique becomes excessively abstract or surrealistic, but scenes showing him speaking directly into the camera always bring viewers back to the reality of his condition; in these scenes he recalls the time his doctor informed him of the leukemia, shares his resentment at doctors who divided his experience into predictable "stages," recounts the remissions that slowed his eventual physical decline, shares his inevitable acceptance of his physical condition, and communicates that spirit of acceptance to his audience through poetry reading.

When he talks directly to the audience, he speaks as a man who has witnessed firsthand the feelings of grief and despair. Some examples: "I don't think people are afraid of death. What they are afraid of is the incompleteness of their lives"; "It isn't until you discover that you're going to die that you realize that whatever it is you have, you've already got--right there"; "I'll always be happier for what I have gone through, only because it has enabled me to have the courage to open myself up to anything that happens."

Although these fragments of his narrative communicate something of the essence of his pain, Rosenthal leaves a unique testament to his spirit in the poems he reads throughout the film. He conveys the anxiety experienced by the hospital patient in this poem:

> Open one eye,
> Suck thermometer; extend pulse; exchange water pitchers.
> Feel skull for night hair-loss. Verify it in mirror.
> Swallow thioguanine; eat breakfast, reread night poem
> Written in anger.

At the end of the film we hear him read another poem that seems to sum up his experience with dying:

> Though you may find me picking flowers
> Or washing my body in a river, or kicking rocks,
> Don't think my eyes don't hold yours
> And look hard upon them
> And drop tears as long as you stay before me
> Because I live as a man who knows death
> And I speak the only truth
> To those who will listen.

This film, which is aimed at adult audiences, would be useful in stimulating discussion about the effects of terminal illness on the individual. Although it represents an individualized response to grief and sometimes appears to overwhelm viewers with a complex set of images, those scenes that focus on Rosenthal's narrative as well the selections of poetry we hear him read are enough to impress viewers with the intensity of feelings the terminally ill person experiences. As Rosenthal says, "Life is grim but not necessarily serious." Using this film in conjunction with other more straightforward analyses of the topic would be advisable.

The Lost Phoebe

Perspective Films, 1974, 30 min.

When a lonely older man refuses to accept his wife's recent death, he begins to look for his "lost Phoebe," wandering all over the countryside and into the small town nearby, sometimes becoming a nuisance because of his erratic behavior. But no one in the town, neither his former friends nor the authorities, confronts him directly about his psychological problem. No one reminds him that his wife is dead and that he needs to begin to work through the extremities of his grief. Although his insistence that his Phoebe is still alive makes them uncomfortable, they tolerate his strange behavior, laugh at him behind his back, and play along with his fantasizing. Eventually he begins to wander even more aimlessly, finally dying alone in the foothills.

The filmmaker recreates his story using realistic, well-developed characters, who are trapped by their inability to break through the main character's fantasy world. Whereas the main character in the film Piece of Cake had a devoted friend who finally puts him in touch with reality, reminding him that his daughter was actually dead, no one steps forth in The Lost Phoebe to do the same. The filmmaker does not intend to indict the main character's friends and neighbors; instead, the film reminds us how vulnerable we are sometimes to displays of grief. The film is aimed at a high school to adult audience, and it would be appropriate as part of a program aimed at interpreting a variety of expressions of grief.

Number Our Days

Hackford/Littman Productions, 1976, 29 min.

Anthropologist Barbara Meyerhoff examines the responses to retirement living made by a number of Jewish immigrants in Venice, California. She says, "Age is a series of losses," but she discovers a wide variety of responses to loss on the part of the members of this retirement community. Ms. Meyerhoff talks to several individuals, gaining some understanding of their coping strategies. One person teaches her that "making a new friend at this age is an act of courage." She interprets another couple's interaction: "Mike is helpless in one way. He can not protect Bertha from her own painful reminiscences." The senior citizen center, where the people in the community congregate, is a place "where time, death, and the outside world are transcended." The filmmaker attempts to capture the air of celebration and community within the center, showing people dancing together, remembering former friends who have died, and carrying on the daily activities that help maintain a sense of community for a group of people who may feel alienated from the rest of society.

Throughout the film Ms. Meyerhoff's "personal quest" is the focus of her presentation. Each of her interviews becomes material for her generalizations. Each of her interactions are meant to reflect her sensitivity and concern for the individual, but sometimes they border on the intrusive and the manipulative. The poignancy of these scenes appears forced, even contrived. But she insists that her involvement with the community has been helpful to her personally: "I look at my own gray hairs now with something akin to affection." Audiences will gain some insights into the dynamics of a well-defined community of older people in this film, which is appropriate for the study of cultural anthropology, especially as it relates to the problems faced by ethnic and cultural groups who attempt to assimilate themselves into a complex society.

Passing Quietly Through

Grove Films, 1970, 20 min., b & w

Mr. Brick is one of many older people who live out desolate existences in one-room apartments in shabby hotels. An invalid, he is visited every day by a public health nurse. When we see her arrive for a morning's visit, at first she is brusque and impersonal, viewing her job as unpleasant, and thinking of Mr. Brick as one of the many "miserable ordinary failures" she feeds and bathes every day.

But Mr. Brick's force of character is too great to suppress. While she gives him his "nice bath," he speaks frankly and even crudely about his sexual frustrations. When she suggests he go to a nursing home, he snaps, "Not with all those people dying. That smell." Later, he adds, "How would you like to be in a home with a hundred people who are in as much misery as I'm in?" The more she tries to remain indifferent and aloof toward him, the more frank he is in his assessment of his situation, bitterly revealing his anger and loneliness. Finally, he breaks through the surface of her professional resolve when he asks her, "Are you lonely at night?" Having listened to him admit to his feelings openly, revealing his vulnerability, now she responds to his question, recalling the early years of her marriage, when she experienced feelings of uncertainty and loneliness herself. Based on this sharing of feelings, he concludes, "All we have to do is be missed by someone when we're gone. And maybe I will miss you, because I told you something about myself." As she leaves for the day, she says, "Save up your energy, old man. Then you can rage on in the morning."

Although the film is a stark and realistic portrayal of the loneliness of old age, the woman's gradual realization that she has something in common with the old man lessens the darkness imposed by Mr. Brick's rage. The film is not recommended for general audiences, but it would be approporiate for use by professionals who will be able to offer interpretations of the reasons behind the anger, frustration, and fears that Mr. Brick and the public health nurse exhibit. The dialogue, which includes some highly explicit language, is sometimes hard to follow because of a poor sound track.

Rose By Any Other Name

Adelphi Univ. Center on Aging, 1979, 15 min.

This film bravely tackles a complex problem facing administrators and staffs of long-term-care facilities: what is the appropriate policy regarding sex between consenting adults within the institution? The film opens with Rose Gordon entering the room of another resident, Mr. Morris. Soon the two are in bed together, and they clearly enjoy each other's company. "You're such a comfort," Mr. Morris says. Frustrated by Rose's breach of his policy that forbids sex between consenting adults in the institution, the administrator calls Rose's daughter and requests that she talk to Rose in order to resolve the crisis. But Rose refuses to change her behavior. She asks her daughter, "Does anybody ever stop needing?" Her daughter is frustrated by Rose's argument, and she confronts the administrator, complaining about all the rules. His response: "The residents expect a dignified atmosphere. There is also the reputation of our home to consider."

For some time Rose tries to restrain her natural impulses toward Mr. Morris. But trying to control her feelings only makes both of them feel miserable. Then we see Rose confront the administrator: "You're asking me to give up my private life." His response: "We're all family here." She retorts, making clear the film's message: "Mr. Morris and I have become lonely people again. Today he's an old man." His response is predictable: "You're leaving me no alternative." He warns her that she will be expelled if she continues a sexual relationship with Mr. Morris. The climax: Rose enters Mr. Morris' room one night, and when a nurse spots her going inside, she tells the adminstrator, who comes down the hallway, and standing outside the room, intones, "You're leaving me no alternative."

Although the film tries to present the two sides of the conflict, its wooden and stereotypical characterizations undermine to a great extent its attempt to deal with a serious issue. The only character who emerges as interesting and three-dimensional is Rose herself, who suffers the humiliation of being treated like a juvenile delinquent by her daughter and by the nursing home administrator, and suffers even moreso when separated from Mr. Morris, a man she cares for deeply. If the filmmaker could have brought out the complexities of the various characters, especially Rose's daughter and the nursing home administrator, and have communicated the subtleties of the conflict, the outcome would have been more thought-provoking and emotionally satisfying. Perhaps the film would need to be expanded in order to accomplish those ends. At its current length, it succeeds moreso as a "trigger film," intended to stimulate discussion of its topic.

The Street
National Film Board of Canada, 1976, 10 min.

This film utilizes a unique form of animation, in which characters, drawn in vivid shades of color, appear on the screen and then dissolve before our eyes, like watercolors come to life. The film tells a universal story--the death of a family member--primarily from the point of view of a young boy, who announces early in the film, "The summer my grandmother was supposed to die--or as my mother said, 'pass away,' we didn't leave the city." But the filmmaker incorporates multiple points of view, including the boy's parents, his sister, some of the boy's friends, his grandmother's physician, and the family's rabbi, in order to express some of the humor and pathos behind this simple human tragedy. The boy's mother is portrayed as a faithful parent and dutiful daughter, who labors all day for her family and still is the primary care-giver for her mother. When she is forced to stay in bed because of physical exhaustion, the rest of the family meet quickly and decide to place the grandmother in a nursing home. Two weeks later the mother recovers and visits the old woman in the nursing home. The filmmaker focuses on her husband's point of view, waiting patiently for her inevitable return. "I was born lucky, and that's it," he says mysteriously, but we understand his ironic meaning when we see his wife return, still in tears after her visit, while the grandmother is carried upstairs to her room again. Then he cocks his head and repeats his cryptic message, adding, "I knew it." Similar humorous touches are added throughout the film. In no way is the film a grim look at death and grief. At the same time it is not simply a light sketch that ignores the seriousness of the subject.

But the adults' responses to loss are less significant than the children's points of view depicted in the film, particularly the young grandson's point of view. The mystery and fearfulness of of his grandmother's impending death oppresses the young boy, and he feels a personal connection to the grandmother's dying that troubles him deeply. The old woman stays in the room that had been promised to him at his next birthday, and he feels guilty that he resents her presence, frustrating his opportunity to move into the room. His subconscious fears are magnified by the fixations of some of his friends, who attach a macabre significance to such things as the "death rattle" and the fact that a dying person's hair continues to grow even after she is dead. At the end of the film, after the grandmother has died, the young boy and his sister talk one night in her bedroom. Now the young boy is afraid to take up residence in the room his grandmother died in, and his sister only makes matters worse when she pulls the covers over her head and taunts her brother, pretending she is the grandmother's ghost, come back to haunt him for his evil thoughts.

This remarkable film is strongly recommended to audiences interested in studying the effect of death on family as well as community relationships. Although younger audiences will identify with the boy's attitude, some of the subconscious fears portrayed in the boy's reactions will need to be clarified for younger viewers. Adult audiences, including health care professionals and religious educators, will gain many insights from the film.

Tomorrow Again

Pyramid Films, 1971, 16 min., b & w

An aged woman, who lives alone in a shabby hotel room, goes down to the lobby one day, wearing an old mink stole. She hopes she will be noticed by some of the men, who will say, "Hello, Grace. You look lovely today." But she is ignored by all the men, who sit immobile, isolated from one another. Crushed by their indifference, she returns to her room, and after crying for a moment, opens a brown bag and prepares to eat an apple for her lunch.

Woven into this simple, desperate story is an intriguing series of fragmented scenes that underscore the tragedy of Grace's existence. At separate points in the film we see, from what appears to be Grace's point of view, chilling scenes of people in the hallway, looking down at her; policemen hovering above her as they move down a stairway; and later a neighbor woman, who leans over to ask, "Granny? Are you all right?" Each time such a scene appears, we wonder if we are seeing snatches of scenes that will be combined to form the last scene of the film--when Grace will suffer either a heart attack or a stroke. But this anticipated final scene never materializes, and viewers are left to imagine the tragedy that seems inevitable in the life of this neglected individual.

Tomorrow Again is a stark portrayal of a lonely woman, and it makes a powerful statement on the effects of isolation on individuals when they fail to reach out to others. Grace struggles to be recognized as a person, but she encounters people who have withdrawn from any meaningful human contact. Unlike the main character in For Gentlemen Only, Grace does not have a faithful friend who recognizes the extent of her emotional pain.

Because of its complex structure, this film is not easily accessible to a wide range of viewers, but adult audiences will be able to identify with Grace's somewhat bizarre behavior, which is delineated clearly and realistically by the filmmaker. The film may be useful as a means of stimulating discussion in programs that cover the general topics of the emotional needs of older people living alone or the effects of adverse living conditions on older people. Educators and health care professionals who want to stress the desolation and loneliness that older people experience will find the film an interesting supplement to their programs.

The Transformation of Mabel Wells

Xerox Films, 1975, 12 min.

Mabel Wells is an eccentric, colorful character, who is known as the "block character," or "the crank of 75th Street" in her New York City neighborhood. In fact, Mabel Wells is a shopping bag lady with a difference. For nearly thirty years Mabel has risen early every morning--like clockwork--in order to begin her daily round of activity, which includes "policing" part of Central Park. Offended by what she considers the careless behavior of the people who frequent the park, Mabel can be spotted walking her beat, filling her shopping bags with trash or scolding people who get in her way. As the narrator explains, "Her route was always the same." Here and there she stops to complain--about the ponies, because they just go "round and round," then about the carousel, because it just went "up and down." Meanwhile, the narrator concludes, "Along she went, round and round."

Mabel's "transformation" occurs after she is injured by a young bicyclist, who runs into her on the street one day. After recuperating from her injuries, Mabel returns to her apartment on her eightieth birthday and learns a valuable lesson about compassion and neighborliness: most of her neighbors have sent her greeting cards, welcoming her home. We see her seated in her room, reading the many cards. In all of the exterior shots the filmmaker kept Mabel at long range, in order to emphasize her remoteness from human contact. Now she is filmed at close range so that we can begin to feel her humanness and warmth of character. To reinforce this development of character, the filmmaker introduces scenes from Mabel's past, experienced from her point of view. We see her as a young girl, being instructed in the art of origami by her Japanese housekeeper. This woman tells Mabel, "How simple it is to make happiness." As she folds the paper she adds, "Bend a little, fold a little. Folding and bending are difficult, but if you keep trying, you can make something wonderful." The filmmaker returns to the present to show Mabel working at her table, folding colorful paper butterflies. Soon she is on her way to the park to dispense her origami to strangers, hoping to brighten their day. Mabel's transformation is complete.

Appropriate uses for this film include introducing audiences to the dangers of stereotyping older people (the "shopping bag lady syndrome"), exploring the emotional needs of older people, and evaluating the way attitudes become hardened when persons perform needless routines. Although the film's message is not particulary subtle, it offers a bright, upbeat view of the possibilities for emotional growth.

Why Me?

National Film Board of Canada, 1976, 9 min.

In this brief animated film Nesbit Spoon, "an average kind of a person," visits his doctor and is told "just about the worst thing that anyone could hear." His doctor informs Nesbit that he has five minutes to live.

The audience lives most of the next five minutes with Nesbit, who experiences in consecutive order all of the five classic stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Some of his responses are humorous, some touching, and some are outlandish--but audiences will be able to identify with almost all of his responses, which represent a universal statement on the the individual's response to grief.

At first Nesbit thinks his doctor is joking; after all, Nesbit's horoscope for that morning said nothing about his impending death. Then he insists the doctor has him confused with another Spoon; he rummages through the doctor's desk drawer, sending medical records flying. But the doctor shows him his x-ray. There is no mistake.

Nesbit becomes enraged. "Damn! Damn!" he cries. Then he runs around the office, pulling his hair and waving his arms, kicking things and trashing some of the doctor's possessions. "I hate you!" he cries, and threatens to sue the doctor. When the doctor tells him he sympathizes with his fate, Nesbit grabs him by the collar and screams, "You witch doctor! You armchair quack!" The doctor tells him to lie down, but Nesbit jumps onto a chair and declares, "I'll die standing up, thank you."

Suddenly he calms down and tries to make some bargains. He pleads for a miracle drug; he asks the doctor to use him for an experiment; he requests a specialist; he asks the doctor to "freeze him" (cryogenics). He piles bills and coins, his house, his car--everything he owns--on the doctor's desk and says, "You can have them all!" But the doctor insists, "There can be no deal."

Depressed, Nesbit begins to feel sorry for himself, and when the doctor tells him he understands, Nesbit refuses to listen. "Why face the future? There's nothing left." He curls up on the floor in the fetal position, rocking back and forth. "Why go on living?" Finally he calms down, and he sits in front of the doctor, relaxed at last, his feet up on the desk. "Boy, you're quite a philosopher, Doc," he says. He begins to wax eloquent: "That's what I regret most in life--wasting time, rushing around, time wasted." He seems comfortable with his fate. He concludes, "Everybody's got to go sometime. Even you, Doc. Five minutes, five months, five years." He becomes lost in reminiscences, then recounts his vision of the perfect death--the way John Wayne responded in the film The Alamo, fighting valiantly to the end. "What a way to go! What courage!" In a frantic few seconds he resolves all of his personal and business affairs, and when the doctor announces that he has thirty seconds left to live, Nesbit decides to leave at once, saying, "I'm going out there to live every last second!"

This short film is guaranteed to provoke responses in a wide range of audiences, although the bizarre humor and fast-paced ironic statements may be most appropriate for a college-aged audience or adults. It would be useful for stimulating discussion on the diverse set of responses individuals make to the subject of dying, and it would be effective when combined with more informational programming. It might be appropriate as "comic relief" after sustained presentations in a more serious vein, but facilitators are advised to emphasize the "seriousness" of this film's content, despite its humorous context.

THE GREAT CIRCLE OF LIFE:

A Resource Guide

to

Humanistic Films on Aging

CHAPTER FIVE -- LIFE REVIEW

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CHAPTER FIVE -- LIFE REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

Life review is an essential human process, characterized by Robert M. Butler as "the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, in particular the resurgence of unresolved conflicts which can now be surveyed and reintegrated" (Why Survive? Being Old in America, p. 412). The fictional films in this chapter portray characters who employ life review for a number of reasons: some wish to recapture or to relive the past, others seek answers to unresolved conflicts, while others rehearse their versions of failed relationships. Unresolved conflicts dominate in the majority of the characters' experiences.

The women in the films The Detour and Dolly are both institutionalized, the former in a hospital and the latter in a nursing home. Miss Hamilton, the main character in The Detour, is seized by her memories of her youth in another country, when she spent a carefree summer with her lover. As she seeks to recapture the fulfilment of her earlier experience, she fends off the cooly efficient, patronizing, and sometimes insensitive machinations of the hospital staff. The main character in Dolly reexamines the past from a different perspective. Although her reminiscences focus on her relationship to a poor young girl she befriended and took home with her, most of her life review is an attempt to resolve her fears of her own sexuality, suppressed since childhood.

The experiences of the men in The Jogger and The Last Winters also are dominated by unresolved conflicts. The main character in The Jogger is an anonymous Everyman figure, who runs the course on the jogging trail at four different stages of his life. At each stage his thoughts and attitudes express his lack of fulfilment. At no point in his life has he gained a perspective on his entire life. Like the main character in the animated film The Blessings of Love (Chapter One), his life has gone in circles, and he has been alone from its beginning to its end. Charles, the main character in The Last Winters, is faced with a similar prospect because of the self-centered, narrow values that guide his existence. He spends a day trying to find his companion, Marguerite, who has left the rest home without him. As he reviews his relationship with her, viewers learn that Charles' happiness depended solely on Marguerite, a woman who loved to please him, and perhaps even to spoil him. Without Marguerite, Charles wanders, as if lost.

Two films portray characters who gain a sense of perspective on their pasts while facing crises in the present. Moreover, these characters experience a measure of reintegration in their lives; their strengths of character, their personal values, and their enduring wills help them survive. The two characters in The Silver Maiden appear at first to be an odd couple. They are two strangers who meet one day in the park and discover that they have a few things in common: both are Chilean, both lived in or near Santiago, and both knew the famed "Silver Maiden," the governor's daughter. As the two rehearse their versions of the failed affair between the Silver Maiden and a young man, we realize that the old woman on the park bench is the Silver Maiden, and her companion for the day is her former lover. Their life reviews are both humorous and ironic; fortunately, the two appear to enjoy each other's company, and their feelings of compatibility at the end of the film suggest that they will be able to renew their relationship.

The second film that suggests the capacity of life review to aid in the resolution of conflicts is Dying: Reverend Bryant. This non-fiction film, the final segment of the film Dying (see Chapter Four), explores one person's response to his terminal cancer. Reverend Bryant, 57 years old, experiences the denial and the depression associated with the stages of grief, but the film emphasizes his celebration of life and the values--particularly religion and family--that have been a central part of his life. Viewers follow Reverend Bryant's story through several manifestations of life review: we see him speaking directly to the camera about those aspects of his life that have held the greatest meaning to him, we see his wife and him talk openly about their fulfilling relationship, and we follow his family and him as they make a final journey back to his home. He shows his children where he was born, where he worked as a youth, and where his wife and he were married. Then, in a touching scene, he searches through a deserted graveyard, trying to locate his parents' graves. Although he fails to find the markers, one comment he makes in that scene stands out: "This is where it began. We don't know where it's going to end. There may be many generations after me." Reverend Bryant has come home, and he has faced the crisis of his impending death by finding solace in reviewing his life.

INTRODUCTION

When this film begins, viewers quickly realize that something different is happening. Throughout the entire film (except for the last image) viewers never see the main character. Instead, the filmmaker portrays all of the action solely from the main character's point of view. This technique, called "first-person point of view," is rarely used in narrative films because viewers are easily disoriented by the lack of visual references and because it is nearly impossible to identify with a character to such an extent that you see the world only through that person's eyes. But in the context of a brief film, and when the filmmaker chooses to emphasize the ways in which other characters interact with the main character, such first-person point of view may be effective.

That is the case in The Detour. The main character, Katherine Hamilton, is a patient on the coronary care unit of a modern hospital, and the film portrays her last day alive from her point of view. Resuscitated by the tools of modern technology, Katherine struggles to gain control of her destiny, to maintain her dignity in the face of an uncaring and insensitive hospital staff, and to relive a vital experience from her past. Each interaction with a member of the staff brings her closer to realizing each of these aims. In effect, the interventions that are meant to restore her to wholeness actually become a series of "detours" that postpone her inevitable freedom.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) The most unusual technical feature of this film is the use of a sustained first-person point of view; that is, instead of allowing the viewers to see the main character in action, our point of view becomes the point of view of that character. The camera thus becomes the main character's eyes, and all other characters who look at the main character necessarily look right into the camera. We first notice this in scene one, when the doctor looks directly into the camera (thus, looks at Katherine). At that point the filmmaker does not provide an image of Katherine so that we may see her reaction to the doctor's behavior.

   If you choose not to tell your audience about the first-person point of view technique, at least note that this film incorporates an unusual film technique that may appear disorienting to viewers at first. Tell your audience that the filmmaker wants her audience to identify with the main character's experience and that the filming will reinforce that objective.

   If you choose to tell your audience about the first-person point of view technique, ask them to consider some reasons why a filmmaker would employ that technique. Ask your audience to recall films in which that technique was utlilized. What are some of the potential strengths and weaknesses of the technique? Note that this technique works most effectively when the main character is confronted with harsh and antagonistic behaviors. We understand and/or sympathize with her situation because the terms of the conflict are portrayed clearly.

-- An example of one of the strengths of this technique occurs in scene 4 when the hospital chaplain, obviously sincere but boring, speaks the same kind words to Katherine that he uses for all patients. But Katherine doesn't want to hear about her "recovery". Thus, when the camera moves away from the chaplain on two occasions, the viewer realizes that this movement represents Katherine's head, turning from one side of the pillow to the other, as she tries to make the chaplain go away.

2) If you choose to tell your audience about the first-person point of view technique, challenge your audience to concentrate on the technique throughout their viewing; emphasize that one interpretation of the film is that the first-person point of view technique is employed from the beginning to the end of the film. That is, at no point does the filmmaker alter that point of view. If your audience accepts this assertion, they will be able to analyze some interesting scenes:

-- In scene 3 and later in scene 5 the screen appears to go out of focus. If we are seeing what Katherine is seeing, what do the images mean? In scene 5 the screen becomes white. The filmmaker may be suggesting the moment of death--a strong white light.

-- In scene 6 there is a more puzzling example of the use of first-person point of view. We look down on the scene in the hospital room, but we experience the camera swaying, back and forth, as if it were floating in mid-air. For the first time, we actually see Katherine, lying dead in the hospital bed. However, because of the camera's unsteadiness, and because it then moves closer to the bed until it focuses on a close-up of the old photograph, we may suspect that our point of view is still Katherine's point of view. This feeling is reinforced when we hear Katherine's gentle laughter at the end of scene 6. Of course, if Katherine is dead, whose point of view are we experiencing here?

3) Your audience may be curious about the title of this film. Ask them to note aspects of the characters' interaction that might suggest an answer to why that title was chosen. If the film is about a "detour," what is the main character's "destination?"

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We see a dark screen and hear a voice: "Miss Hamilton? Katherine, can you hear me?" Then we hear voices and sounds that originate from inside a hospital. A woman's voice, groaning, "No!" No!" Suddenly we see a doctor

leaning over us, looking right into the camera (looking at Katherine). He is talking excitedly about the staff's successful effort to resuscitate Katherine. He continues to talk to her, but we no longer hear his words. Instead, we hear her thoughts: "I wonder why they try so hard. Am I really worth the effort? See how they smile in delight that they brought me back."

2. She writes her dinner order out on a blackboard because she cannot speak. "I wish there was enough room on this blackboard to tell them what I really think of their hospital," she muses. The next intruder is another doctor, who insists on peering right into her mouth. "Who is this creature?" She chases him out by breathing hard into his face. As he leaves, she thinks, "If you insist on keeping me alive, I will tolerate only handsome men in this room."

   Here comes the orderly with her dinner. The eggs are nearly burned. She flings them against the wall. "To the victor belong the spoils. Et tu, Brute?"

3. While an orderly is shown cleaning the wall, in comes a nurse. She confides, "I hear you've been throwing eggs around today. Listen, I don't blame you." Another doctor, a young one, comes in at this moment. He and the nurse enjoy a tete-a-tete at the foot of Katherine's bed. The doctor asks the nurse about a party they attended the night before. Katherine laughs at this moment of "intimacy." When the nurse leaves, Dr. Kramer sits on the edge of Katherine's bed and examines her. Suddenly Katherine realizes he reminds her of someone. "He reminds me of that summer in Italy. . . Carlo." The camera moves to the right. We see a window; then the screen goes out of focus as Katherine remembers the past. We hear a man's voice: "Katherine, will you come back and see me?" Then we hear a young woman calling out fearfully. "What should we do?" she cries. "We will make love until then and not think about it," the man answers.

4. The screen returns to focus, and we see a middle-aged chaplain standing above the bed, speaking in platitudes about her recovery. As he rambles on, suddenly Katherine turns her head away from him, and he follows her gaze. When he moves to the side so that she can see his face, she turns her head back again to get away from him. She returns to thoughts of the past as the chaplain's image goes out of focus: "I loved your hair. I loved the way you touched me. I never felt ashamed."

   The screen returns to focus on the chaplain again. He asks her if he can do something for her. To his delight, she writes on the blackboard, "Carlo Anton, Milan, Italy." He asks her to write the reason for wanting to see him. She writes on the other side of the blackboard: "Copulation." When she hands it to him, he begins to read it--then gasps--and erases that word before leaving the room quietly. As he walks out, she thinks, "Have pity on an old lady, dear sir. Bring him back to me. Tell him I'll be waiting here."

5. The next scene begins with a new orderly who comes in and taunts her relentlessly. Angry that she has reported him for his crude behavior, he shoves the bedpan toward her and sneers, "Just do your duty like a good little girl." Then he brings his face right up to hers whispers, "And I'll give you a great big kiss." We see her hand reach out as she slaps him. He

leaps back and snaps, "You ugly puss." She begins throwing things at him as he mocks her. The nurse comes in and ushers him out, then tries to comfort Katherine, who is distraught. But the screen suddenly turns green, and ghostly images seem to float upward. Meanwhile, we hear in the background the nurse calling in a coronary emergency.

After a few seconds an image returns to the screen. We see the young Dr. Kramer, leaning over the bed and looking down at his patient. Then he looks up and says, "We have a rhythm." We hear Katherine's voice as she screams, "No!" The screen goes white momentarily.

6. Then we return to the hospital scene, but this time we look down on Dr. Kramer, who is standing next to Katherine's bed. For the first time we see Katherine, the white hospital sheet up to her neck. To the doctor's right is a young nurse, pushing a large machine out of the room. Both characters move in slow motion, and the camera portraying the scene sways back and forth, further disorienting us. The doctor and the nurse, ignoring Katherine for a moment, laugh about something (perhaps a social engagement). Then the camera moves in toward the bed, but at the foot of the bed it veers off to the side and moves to a closeup of an old photograph of Katherine, as a young woman, standing next to a lake (Milan, Italy?). We hear a gentle laugh from Katherine.

7. As the credits go up, we see various old photographs of Katherine as a young woman, often with other young people. We might guess that many of these pictures show scenes from Katherine's youth in Italy.

--1971, Phoenix Films, 13 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What were some of the strengths and weaknesses of the first-person point of view technique?

2. How did the use of the first-person point of view technique affect your overall response to the film? Did it help you understand and/or emphathize with Katherine's thoughts and feelings?

3. Did you ever feel that you were the patient? How did that make you feel?

II. The Detour.

3. What was the "detour"? What was Katherine's "destination"?

4. How was our attitude toward members of the hospital staff determined by their interaction with Katherine?

5. What was on the mind of the various members of the hospital staff when they interacted with Katherine? How did that affect our attitude toward them?

6. Although Katherine was visited by many hospital staff members, why was she not comforted by their visits?

7. What does the filmmaker intend to convey with regard to the conflict between the health-care professionals' desire to use modern technology in order to prolong life and the individual's need to gain control of her own destiny?

III. Life Review.

8. Who was Carlo? Why do you think Katherine spent so much time thinking about him?

9. When Katherine first recalls Carlo, what do you think the filmmaker intended to convey by allowing us to hear the two voices (apparently Carlo and the young Katherine)? What does that reminiscence have to do with Katherine's present condition?

10. At one point, Katherine thinks, "I loved your hair. I loved the way you touched me. I never felt ashamed." What do you think she is referring to? In what way is that recollection related to Katherine's decision to write the word "copulation" on the blackboard?

11. Why was the chaplain's reaction to Katherine's writing "copulation" on the small blackboard not surprising? What do you think the filmmaker was trying to convey in this scene?

12. How are the series of old photographs shown at the conclusion of the film an integral part of Katherine's story?

IV. Interpreting Visual Images.

13. What was your impression of the action at the end of scene 5 (when the screen became green, and ghostlike images moved across the screen)? What was the filmmaker trying to convey in this scene?

14. What do you think the filmmaker was trying to convey in scene 6 (when the screen turns white, and then we see Katherine in her bed)? Why did we hear a gentle laugh from Katherine just as the camera showed a closeup of the old photograph on her bedstand?

V. General Questions.

15. What statement does the film make about the importance of communication between health care staffs and their patients?

16. To what extent were the characterizations of the members of the hospital staff stereotypical or one-sided? Were those one-dimensional characterizations necessary in order for the filmmaker to make a statement about the dynamics of the interactions between patients and members of hospital staffs?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET A

As you view the film, evaluate the attitudes of the various health-care professionals who interact with Miss Hamilton. Consider each of the following questions as they relate to those interactions:

a) How would you characterize the staff member's attitude toward the patient, Miss Hamilton? What was Miss Hamilton's opinion of their attitudes and/or behavior?

b) What factors in the character's atttitudes and/or behavior affected Miss Hamilton's emotional response?

c) Which of the characters were presented as stereotypical? What do you think the filmmaker intended to convey by creating stereotypical characters?

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1) Doctor in scene 1 (with black hair and black glasses) after Miss Hamilton had been resuscitated:

2) The orderly who takes her request for breakfast (scene 2):

3) Nurse Taft, who gives her a shot in scene 3:

4) Dr. Kramer, who examines her in scene 3:

5) The chaplain, who visits her in scene 4:

6) The orderly who brings in her bedpan (scene 5):

SAMPLE WORKSHEET B

Evaluate the following film techniques employed by the filmmaker. In each case, consider each of the questions below:

a) What do you think the filmmaker intended to convey by using this technique?

b) How did the use of the technique help you understand and/or identify with Katherine's emotional responses?

c) How did the use of the technique affect your emotional response to the film?

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1) The use of the first-person point of view (seeing the action as the viewer is the main character):

2) In scene 5 the image of Nurse Taft is replaced with moving ghostlike images against a green screen; we hear Nurse Taft's voice in the background, calling in a coronary emergency:

3) At the end of scene 6 we see Dr. Kramer leaning over the bed, looking directly at Katherine. "We have a rhythm," he says. We hear Katherine's voice as she yells, "No!" The screen turns white.

4) The screen is white momentarily; at the beginning of scene 6 we see from a high angle Katherine lying in bed, apparently dead. As Dr. Kramer and a nurse withdraw from the scene, the camera, swaying slightly, remains focused on Katherine.

5) After a moment the camera moves toward the bed, then focuses on an old photograph of Katherine (as a young woman). We hear a gentle laugh from Katherine:

INTRODUCTION

Although Dolly is a mere ten minutes long, this animated film is crowded with a complex set of images and an intricate story-line. The film begins with an older woman, apparently institutionalized in a nursing home, talking to a nurse. As this woman reviews her life, we begin to realize that she never has overcome some of the bitter memories and puzzling emotions she experienced in the past. She tells the story of "Dolly," a young girl she befriended during the depth of the Depression. She took the girl home with her, but from the first she was unable to mold her into the model child--her own "dolly"--that she had hoped for. Instead, when the young girl resists her attempts to control her, the older woman recalls a last-ditch attempt to win the girl's affection. She gives the girl a doll she had as a child, but even her gift-giving fails to assuage the older woman's fears that Dolly is out of her control. Finally, after she takes the doll away from Dolly, the young girl runs away from her. The older woman tells the nurse, "I thought if I could get rid of that doll, we'd go back to being just the two of us. But after that it wasn't the same. Soon Dolly didn't come anymore, even though I looked for her."

The older woman's memories of her Dolly are juxtaposed with drawings that represent images of her own repressed sexuality: a snake wrapped around an apple, a naked woman, a cupid shooting an arrow, a naked man. In addition, images of a woman's breasts and a woman's pubic area suggest that the older woman has failed to integrate her sexuality as part of her identity. The older woman's memories of her parents' relationship provide hints of the source of this lack of integration: a particularly significant scene depicts the narrator as a young girl being questioned by her father after she was caught playing with her doll. Echoing her father's criticism, the older woman laments, "Who knows what makes children so disappointing?" Then she recalls the pain of this inquisition: "He asked Mother to find out why I undressed the doll. All that trouble because of the doll."

The older woman's life review raises troubling questions about the damage parents can inflict on children when they are uncertain about and uncomfortable with their own sexuality. To some extent, the narrator of the film is burdened with the legacy of her parents' Victorian attitudes, and although her relationship with Dolly fails, it represents an attempt to recover some of the innocence of childhood that was lost when her parents encouraged her to repress her sexuality.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Prepare your audience for viewing this film by explaining that the film portrays the life review of an older person who has been unable to resolve some of her experiences from the past. The older woman, now in a wheel chair, tells her story to a nurse. Ask your viewers to concentrate on that unresolved part of the past as they listen in on the older woman's life review.

2) Tell your audience that although the film is only ten minutes long, they will find themselves "bombarded" with a number of complex images. Prepare them for this aspect of the film by noting that many of the images are repeated throughout the film. Ask them to consider why the filmmaker chooses to repeat the many images. Ask them to find patterns in the various images; tell them that the images address a common theme or problem related to the narrator's experiences in the past.

3) If it is possible, show the film twice. After the first viewing, ask your audience to begin to sort out some of the complex images they have just viewed. Note that in a second viewing, the audience will be able to concentrate more easily on the important patterns of repeated images. Be prepared for an extended discussion after this second viewing.

4) Ask your audience to note the music played in the background throughout the film. Perhaps some members of your audience will recognize this hymn, titled "This is My Father's World." After viewing the film, ask your audience to consider how the choice of music comments on the woman's story about Dolly.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We see a single eye on the screen and hear piano music. More eyes appear, against a light gray background, and many still drawings begin to move onto and off of the screen. We are introduced to the significant characters in the rest of the film: a young woman (Dolly), a doll, a father, a mother, the black servant Joseph, an old woman in a wheelchair, who is the narrator.

   She begins to speak. "Do I have children? Oh, no, nurse. I never married. But I did know a child once, who was just like mine." She tells her story. "It was a long time ago, right after father died."

2. We see a young woman, Dolly, singing for food on a street corner during the Depression. The old woman recalls seeing her there for the first time. "I took to Dolly right away. Dolly wasn't her real name. It was my name for her. My Dolly." She decides to invite her to her home. "I was alone there after father died," she adds. "I'd get some good food for Dolly and maybe I'd even make her a dress." Eventually Dolly comes to visit alone: "Every Saturday night she came to me, and that was good."

3. We see Dolly at the woman's house. "It wasn't right for her to be singing out on the street like poor white trash." Then we see images of Dolly in provocative poses, with many men gathered around her, staring. "She was a good child, though, and we got on just fine."

   She mentions the time Dolly asked her for some candy. "All children like sweets." Note that the background changes color to a golden yellow, and for the first time we see the woman recalling a time when she was a child, too. We see her seated at a table, her back to us. Across from her is her mother, and her father stands behind the table to her mother's left. As we see this "inquisition" scene, the woman says sadly, "I liked candy too much."

She complains about other problems with Dolly. Again we see images of Dolly in alluring poses, dressed scantily, while men stand around her. "What would I do if I couldn't control her?"

4. She plans to make a dress for her Dolly. She decides to use money set aside for Joseph, the black servant she kept on after her father died.

   We see an image of the woman as a child again, standing near Joseph, while her father stands nearby. Note the yellow background. "Father always knew what to do about Joseph." We see the girl's arms encircle Joseph. "I did hang around that man." She says harshly, "A white child has no business doing that!" We see the woman as a young girl, seated at the table in the "inquisition" scene from above. Sadly, she adds, "I didn't know any better."

5. She plans to take Dolly to church in order to show her off. We see images of the women at church and the minister. "They'd all have something to say." But she adds, gloomily, "It turned out to be a bad day. She got away from me--completely disappeared!"

   We see images of eyes everywhere. Then we see Dolly sitting under a tree. Her image changes to show a grotesque body, with a huge black belly, apple-shaped, an archetypal image of a snake wrapped around the apple. The woman recalls Amy Breckenridge, a young girl who was found alone one day, sitting under a tree, "abusing herself." Eyes fill the screen. "Whoo! It was awful!" She recalls that the girl never came back to church. We see images of people staring. "I never got around to taking her back to church."

6. She decides to give Dolly a doll she had as a child. Note the change to a yellow background, as we see the woman as a child, playing with her doll. "Naturally I pretended I was her mother. The doll was me and I was her mother."

   Suddenly the doll is shown undressed, in a reclining position, against the yellow background. Then the doll's pubic area begins to enlarge and separate from the body. The shape expands until it almost fills the screen. "I told her I would find out what made her so bad." Then we see the woman, as a young girl, looking into this enlarged pubic area, so large it appears to be a grey hole, with a darker area within it. "My mother would never be bad like that." We focus on a closeup of the black area inside the enlarged darkness. In rapid succession we see images appear inside the black area: a snake wrapped around an apple, a naked woman, a cupid shooting an arrow, a naked man. The woman says, "I wanted to be perfect--like mother."

7. Now the woman, as a young child, is surrounded by two huge black circles. They enlarge and encircle her. Then we see an image of her mother within the black circles.

   We return to the image of the old woman in a wheelchair. She complains, "Who knows what makes children so disappointing? Who knows!"

   We see against the yellow background the "inquisition" scene again. "He asked Mother to find out why I undressed the doll. All that trouble because of the doll." In rapid succession we see images of the half-dressed woman in provocative poses. Men are crowded around her. "Father always said you have to control children. They get away from you if you don't." She shuts her doll away in a box.

8. Dolly becomes fond of the little doll. "Things got out of control." She takes the doll away from the girl and gives it to Joseph, who has grandchildren. Again we see the "inquisition" scene against the yellow background. "They told me the bad thoughts people had begin to show on their faces. You can see them there." The woman is shown as a young girl, hugging Joseph. She adds, "I wondered what Joseph could see on my face." Then the alluring woman, surrounded by men again. "Father could see everything." The image of the young girl looking into the large dark area, as into a cave. Inside is a naked woman. "Father said my mother was a saint." Then we see images of the church and of her mother. "I promised God if he would take the bad thoughts off my face, I would never play with that doll again."

9. An image of the old woman in a wheelchair. "Don't you know, nurse? I thought if I could be rid of that doll, we'd go back to being just the two of us. But after that it wasn't the same. Soon Dolly didn't come anymore, even though I looked for her."

--1975, Phoenix Films, 10 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What images stand out in your memory after viewing this film? Did you have any difficulty understanding the significance of all of the images?

2. How would you characterize the relationship between the woman and Dolly? Why didn't it work out?

3. What is the real subject of this film? If it isn't simply a story of the woman's relationship to Dolly, what is it the story of?

II. The Woman's Relationship to Dolly.

4. At one point the woman complains, "What would I do if I couldn't control her? Why did she feel the need to control her?

5. Did you find anything unusual about the way the woman reacted when she first saw Dolly? Remember that she said, "I took to Dolly right away. Dolly wasn't her real name. It was my name for her. My Dolly."

6. What are the concerns the woman begins to voice when Dolly does come to stay with her? Can you remember any images that emphasized the woman's concerns?

7. Why did she want to take Dolly to church with her? What went wrong that day? Why didn't the woman take Dolly to church again?

8. Who was Amy Breckenridge, and what did she have to do with Dolly's predicament?

9. When Dolly becomes fond of the doll the woman gave her, the woman says, "Things got out of control." How did the woman resolve this situation? What was your opinion of her resolution?

10. Why didn't Dolly come back to live with the woman at the end?

III. The Woman and her Doll.

11. When the woman recalls the doll she had as a young girl, we see her in a scene from the past, playing with her doll (scene 6). She says, "Naturally, I pretended I was her mother. The doll was me, and I was her mother." Why do you think the woman wanted to establish this relationship?

12. When the woman recalls the doll she had as a young girl, we see the doll in the screen (scene 6). The image reclines, and suddenly the pubic area begins to enlarge and almost fill the screen. The woman says, "I told her I would find out what made her so bad." What do you think she means by this statement?

13. This same image stays on the screen, a gray outer area with a darker area within it. Then we see the young woman looking inside this image. What is this image meant to convey? The woman says, "My mother would never be bad like that." Why does she say this?

14. This same image stays on the screen while several images appear inside in rapid succession. Can you recall what images appeared inside that dark area? What do you think they were meant to signify?

15. After suffering punishment for playing with her doll, the woman recalls that she shut the doll away in a box for many years (scene 7). What do you think this action has to do with the woman's problems?

16. At the end of the film, the woman takes the doll away from Dolly when the young girl spends too much time playing with the doll. What is the real reason she takes the doll away from Dolly?

17. After she is punished by her parents for playing with the doll, the woman recalls saying, "I promised God if he would take the bad thoughts off my face, I would never play with that doll again." Why does she say this?

IV. Mother and Father.

18. How did the woman's relationship with her mother differ from her relationship with her father?

19. What effect do you think her father's death, and her being alone in her parents' house after his death, have on the woman who told this story?

20. When we see the enlarged pubic area of the doll in scene 6, several images appear inside this dark area: a snake wrapped around an apple, a naked woman, a cupid shooting an arrow, a naked man. The woman says, "I wanted to be perfect--like mother." What do you think she meant by that? How would you interpret this scene?

21. In scene 7 we see the woman, pictured as a young girl, surrounded by two huge black circles. What do you think they are meant to signify? Why does the image of her mother suddenly appear between the circles?

22. What was her father's opinion regarding the behavior of young children? How did his opinion affect the woman throughout her life?

23. In scene 8 the woman is shown looking into the dark cave-like area again. Within the image appears the shape of a naked woman. The woman says, "Father said my mother was a saint." Why does she remember his statement at that moment?

24. The music that played in the background throughout the film was the hymn, "This is My Father's World." One of the verses: "Why should my heart be sad? The Lord is King, let the heavens ring; God reigns, let the earth be glad." What do you think the filmmaker is trying to convey by choosing this song?

V. Attitudes Toward Aging.

24. What feelings did the image of the old woman in the wheelchair evoke as you saw it at different points in the film?

25. What has the woman gained by telling her story to the nurse?

26. What does the film suggest about the way our lives are shaped by family influences or by circumstances related to our involvement with family?

27. In scene 7 the woman exclaims, "Who knows what makes children so disappointing? Who knows!" When you consider her statement in the context of her own experiences, what feelings does it evoke? What is the answer to her question?

28. Do you think the film honestly and realistically portrays the experience of aging? Do you think it contributes any negative stereotypes of aging?

29. If you were the woman's nurse, what would you have said to the woman after listening to her story?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET A

The complex set of images that appear in this film offer multiple perspectives on the main character's psychological state of mind. Consider each of the images noted below in order to analyze her life review:

a) What do you think this image is meant to signify? Why is this image repeated throughout the film?

b) What do you think the image reveals about the narrator's emotional and/or psychological state of mind?

c) What do you think the image reveals about the narrator's relationship to Dolly?

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1) Images of eyes:

2) An image of a snake wrapped around an apple:

3) Image of the arms of a character enlarging and beginning to encircle another character on the screen:

4) An image of a scantily dressed young woman, shown in provocative poses, while men stand around her, watching her closely.

5) What appears to be an image of an enlarged pubic area, so large it appears to be a grey hole, with a darker area within it:

6) Two huge black circles that surround the narrator (as a young girl), then enlarge and encircle her. The image of the narrator's mother appears within the black circles (This image appears once, in scene 7):

SAMPLE WORKSHEET B

A key scene in the film appears for the first time in scene 3, showing the narrator as a young girl seated at a table, her back to the viewer. Across from her is her mother, also seated, and her father stands behind the table to her mother's left. Consider the following questions as they relate to this "inquisition" scene:

1) The first time you see the scene, what did you think it was meant to signify? What do you think the filmmaker meant to convey by means of the composition of this scene (that is, the arrangement of the characters within the frame)?

2) Why does the image of this scene stand out in the memory of the older woman who narrates the film? In what way does this image help viewers gain some perspective on the older woman's emotional and/or psychological condition? How does the scene help viewers understand the nature of her relationship with her parents?

3) When the woman recalls the doll she had as a young girl, we see the doll with no clothes on in scene 6, then see the girl sitting in the "inquisition" scene again. What caused her father to call her behavior into question? Can you recall anything he said at that time?

4) What does this scene have to do with the narrator's relationship (as a young girl) to the black servant, Joseph?

5) The last time we see the "inquisition" scene the narrator says, "They said the bad thoughts people had begin to show on their faces. You can see them there." What does this statement have to do with her previous experiences?

INTRODUCTION

Reverend Bryant's story is the final segment in this feature-length (97 min.), non-fiction film produced by WGBH-TV in Boston. Like the people featured in earlier segments, Reverend Bryant is dying from cancer, and the filmmaker documents his reactions to his terminal illness and the impact of his illness on his family. But unlike the stories of Sally or Harriet and Bill, which were featured in Chapter Four, Reverend Bryant's response to loss (his impending death from cancer) is a minor part of his overall story. This intensely religious man takes charge of his own destiny and uses this film to explore the essence of his life. Through a form of life review, Reverend Bryant synthesizes the elements of his life experience: his relationship with his wife and family, his lifetime of ministry, his relationship to God. Viewers see a man at rest, comfortable with himself and with his environment, not afraid to reach into the past and find meanings there. Some of the most moving images in the film consist of Reverend Bryant sitting alone in front of the camera, reminiscing about the meaningful events in his life. His self-conviction and humility are genuine, for in Reverend Bryant we see a man who lives according to his values.

Despite the pain and physical decline that accompany the progression of his cancer, his family cares for him patiently and lovingly in his home. After he dies, the church is crowded with mourners at his funeral. Viewers unfamiliar with the structure of a traditional black funeral will find the sounds and images unforgettable: a large choir sings spirituals; a cadre of women, dressed in white uniforms, attends Reverend Bryant's wife and family; the mourners file past the open casket to look at Reverend Bryant for a last time or to touch him softly; attendants stand nearby to keep the line moving and comfort those overcome with grief; outside the church the pallbearers place the casket into the hearse.

Reverend Bryant's story is a fitting climax to the film Dying. Like Sally, he is able to express his philosophy of life in the face of death; in the same way he demonstrates that his ministry to others has been made complete by his ability to accept his dying and inspire others to live more fully. (For additional information, consult the General Introduction to Dying in Chapter Four.)

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) If you are showing this film as the last segment in the entire film Dying, prepare your audience for Reverend Bryant's story by asking them what they expect from a film entitled Reverend Bryant. Remind them of the previous segments: Sandy, Sally, and Harriet and Bill. What sort of progression has the filmmaker incorporated up to this point in the film

Dying? What objectives will the filmmaker want to fulfill in this last segment? What do you think the audience needs to see in this last segment?

2) Ask members of your audience to discuss what types of emotional and psychological support systems are most helpful to dying patients. What role can the family play in supporting the dying individual? What problems exist when families attempt to care for dying patients in their homes? Ask your audience to note the way Reverend Bryant's family copes with the responsibility of caring for Reverend Bryant at home.

3) Ask members of your audience to consider some of the activities they would want to engage in if they knew they had a terminal illness. Would they want to take a special trip? What would they want to do "one more time"? Tell your audience to note the way Reverend Bryant addresses this issue.

4) Ask your audience to discuss the role of life review for the dying person. What are some of the ways life review can help resolve the emotional and psychological fears associated with dying? How can life review be encouraged appropriately for dying persons? Ask your audience to note the filmmaker's emphasis on life review in the story of Reverend Bryant.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Reverend Bryant in a closeup, as he drives his car. He speaks in a deep voice: "If I can live to see all my grandchildren grown." He laughs warmly.

In a clinic examination room, he lies down on a table. He is a thin man. The doctor examines him.

Seated next to his wife, a large woman wearing a red sweater, Reverend Bryant waits for his doctor to speak. They are in his office. The doctor is writing notes. Finally, he turns to the couple and explains the reasons for this latest examination. The tumor Reverend Bryant had has spread into the liver. Reaction of the two across from the doctor: Reverend Bryant lowers his head, shocked, and his wife rubs his back lightly, affectionately. "Could you try that x-ray thing?" Reverend Bryant asks. The doctors calmly explains that such treatment would be futile. "You have to realize there isn't any chance of cure." The reaction of Reverend Bryant: he drops his head and puts his hand to his forehead. His head bowed, he speaks, "I never could talk to this doctor. I never had it told to me before. It's all right. We'll go ahead." He looks up, his face brightened. "There ain't but one thing a man can do in a case like that, and that's put his trust in God." His wife adds a supportive comment. "I ain't upset no more than I was before." Both are quiet, pensive for a moment. "I want to live as long as I can, but I'm not going to die on account of that."

2. In their car on their way home. Reverend Bryant, driving, says, "There ain't but one thing to do. Mentally you have to ignore it." His wife agrees. "That ain't gonna hurt the doctor for me to feel like that."

   At home, a large apartment building, we see Reverend Bryant bend down and kiss his grandchild at the kitchen table, while his wife prepares the meal. He sits at the table, bowed down, quiet. Then he says grace, while the little boy in the background "gobbles." The camera shows the older children at the table, including a young man and woman. Reverend Bryant looks depressed, his head held up by his arm. Then we see him looking across the table at the little boy in the highchair. Suddenly he smiles wide and begins to "moo" like a cow. The little boy "moos" back.

   Mrs. Bryant breaks into the song "Old MacDonald," and the camera shows her in the background, smiling, as her husband watches the little boy and "moos" at the appropriate point in the song.

3. We see Reverend Bryant in a closeup, sitting in front of a magenta-colored background. "I was a foster child. My life was very lonely. And I think when I met my wife, it was a God-given gift." He is looking right into the camera, a serene expression on his face. "I always wished for a big family. It so happened that I ran into my wife, Kathleen, and we was married. And she gave me what I'd never had--a family."

4. Reverend Bryant draped over the pulpit at his church. He is dressed in a flowing black robe, and we can hear an upbeat spiritual being sung by the church choir in the background. As the song continues, we see the young choir director singing, leading the others. All the choir are dressed in green robes, and they clap their hands to the music. Reverend Bryant listens, and we see his wife clapping along. When the song ends, Reverend Bryant returns to the pulpit. "He touched me," he says, and the congregation responds warmly. He tells the story of Jesus bringing a young girl back to life. "Jesus say, 'She is not dead. She is just sleeping.' That's what I say about faith." His wife, her eyes closed, rocks her body rhythmically in sympathy with his homily.

   He continues his sermon, sharing the narrative from The Bible, moving away from the pulpit, gesturing expressively to punctuate the high points of the story. "And the spirit began to move in the body." His wife claps her hands joyfully. He returns to the pulpit, leans over it, and says, "Listen. I've been asked me this question so many times. I want to give an answer to this question before the whole world. People say, 'You know you have cancer.'" Reaction shot of his wife. "'How do you keep from crackin' up?'" In a closeup we see him declare, "I want to answer that question. Jesus one day gave me a little hymn." The congregation responds warmly. He begins to sing "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone" ("and all the world go free, to know there is a cross, for everyone and there is a cross for me"). As he completes the first few words, members of the congregation join in the singing. Reverend Bryant stands in front of a white cross on the wall behind him, and we watch him sing the song with his whole body, clapping when inspired to clap, finally sitting down after urging the congregation to put their hearts into the singing. The song ends, "I'll go home, my crown to wear, for there is a crown for me." He yells, "Yes, Lord!" at the end.

5. At home again, he looks weaker now seated at the table. He turns to his little grandson again: "Say Granddaddy!" he repeats to the boy. He breaks out laughing. Then he reaches over and takes the baby bottle out of the boy's hand and laughs some more.

   The family is ready for dinner. Reverend Bryant lowers his head and says grace. Then he asks another grandson, who is about six, if he can say grace. The boy is shy, but he follows along, repeating each part of the prayer. "Say Amen." "Amen. I said it," the boy smiles. Reverend Bryant gleams back at him.

6. Reverend Bryant and the grandchild at the seashore. Other members of the family look out at the water.

   In the car, Reverend Bryant reading his Bible, which he rests on the steering wheel, while the light from the setting sun, reflected through his window, illuminates one of the pages.

7. Reverend Bryant shown in closeup, looking directly into the camera. "I can say, right now, that I'm the most happiest man in the word." He says he's even happier than the Rockefellers. "I'm going to try to live out the time I have the happiest and the best I know how."

8. He is in the back seat of the family car, his wife next to him, one of their sons next to her. "I think I'm going to enjoy myself on this trip." He thinks about his dying. "God does these things to slow you down. I'm not the only man that's had the experience of dying."

   Another son, driving, is expressionless, staring at the road. Reverend Bryant sings a hymn in the back seat. Then his wife and he kid the stony-expressioned Junior: "Junior's had a frown on his face ever since we left Boston." Then he says, "Junior, did you ever go see a girl with a toothache?" Junior flashes a smile at this good-natured kidding.

   Reverend Bryant's wife recalls when they dated. They smile affectionately at memories of their love letters.

9. After a rest stop, they continue driving. Reverend Bryant points out landmarks from his youth. They stop at the place where Reverend Bryant and his wife were married. The house is unpainted, with a scarred tin roof--but still standing. They go next to a tobacco field--at this spot the house where Reverend Bryant was born once stood. "This is where it began. We don't know where it's going to end. There may be many generations after me." Later, they wander through an abandoned graveyard, looking for Reverend Bryant's parents' graves. But they don't find the graves.

   In the car on the way home, Reverend Bryant reads his Bible in the back seat. Later, his wife holds the Bible in her lap, while he sleeps on her shoulder.

10. Reverend Bryant in his bed. His wife, sitting next to him, asks him if he needs anything. He can barely speak. A young man comes in, and he helps her turn Reverend Bryant. The pain is evident on Reverend Bryant's face. A daughter sits next to his bed, and the little grandchild, now a toddler, goes up to the bed and kisses him.

11. The boy leaves, and his wife continues to minister to him. "You can't stop trying just because you've had a stroke," he says weakly.

    Shots of the children waiting. Another grandson holds his hand, looking on uncertainly. The adults move him in bed, and we see his bony legs. His son stands, looking down at him, and we see a last closeup of Reverend Bryant, who says in a low voice, "Thank you."

    A graphic appears on a black background: "Rev. Bryant died Jan. 23, 1975."

12. Organ music. Then a chorus sings, "He touched me. . ." We see Reverend Bryant's wife, dressed in a black dress, colored with red and yellow. Reverend Bryant lies in an open coffin. As the chorus sings, she responds, shouting out phrases. She is attended by several women, dressed in white uniforms. One of the women wipes her face with a handkerchief, then holds her hands when she shouts her feelings.

    The music changes to an upbeat spiritual, and we see the mourners file by the casket. One woman breaks down; some people touch the dead man. When the family comes up to the coffin, each responds in their own way, his wife kissing him before she leaves. Outside, the coffin is placed in a hearse. One pallbearer is overcome with grief. The cars drive away.

--1976, Novacom, 37 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. After viewing this film, what do you think you will remember most about Reverend Bryant? What impressed you most about this man?

2. What do you think the word "family" means to Reverend Bryant? Why is his family so important to him?

3. In what ways could Reverend Bryant be viewed as a positive role model for those people who are facing a terminal illness?

II. Reverend Bryant's Response to Dying.

4. Why does the filmmaker begin the film with the scene of Reverend Bryant visiting his physician? How were you affected by the action in this scene?

5. What was your impression of Reverend Bryant's response to his physician's prognosis? Did you feel that he believed the physician's explanation?

6. At what point in the film did you think Reverend Bryant had accepted the fact that he was dying? What happened at that point to convince you of that fact?

7. How does the action in scene 2 (showing Reverend Bryant playing "moo" with his grandson) represent a turning point in his experiences?

III. Reverend Bryant's Philosophy of Life.

8. How would you characterize Reverend Bryant's "philosophy of life"? Can you recall specific examples of that philosophy in action?

9. What was your impression of Reverend Bryant when you first saw him talking directly to the audience in scene 3? Why does the filmmaker include these scenes of Reverend Bryant alone (scenes 3 and 7)?

10. Why is Reverend Bryant "the most happiest man in the world" (scene 7)?

11. When we see Reverend Bryant preaching to his congregation (scene 4), he tells them he wants to give an answer to those people who ask him how he maintains his self-control despite his terminal illness. What is appropriate about his choice of the hymn "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?" as his answer? What effect does his answer have on his congregation?

12. How does Reverend Bryant's religion pervade his philosophy of life? Can you recall specific scenes in which Reverend Bryant's reading his Bible helped viewers understand his attitude toward his situation?

IV. The Importance of Family.

13. How does Reverend Bryant's family provide significant emotional support for him throughout the film?

14. To what extent does Reverend Bryant's role in his family change during his illness? To what extent does it remain the same? Can you recall specific scenes that illustrated his role within the family?

15. How would you characterize the relationship between Reverend Bryant and his wife, Kathleen? Can you recall scenes that showed the two relating to each other in significant ways?

16. What are some of the reasons Reverend Bryant wanted to make the trip back to his home (scenes 8 and 9)? How does this trip help him resolve some of his feelings about his dying? How were you affected when Reverend Bryant and his family were unable to find his parents' graves?

17. What do you think Reverend Bryant meant when he stood next to a field (in scene 9) and said, "This is where it began. We don't know where it's going to end. There may be many generations after me." How do these statements help us understand his values?

V. General Questions.

18. How were you affected by the scenes of Reverend Bryant in bed, his body weakened, while his family cares for him (scenes 10 and 11)? How was his response to his physical decline consistent with his earlier responses to his illness?

19. What scenes in the film were most difficult for you to watch? What are some of the reasons the filmmaker included those scenes in the film?

20. The last words we hear from Reverend Bryant are "Thank you," after a member of the family moves his body in bed. Why are those words an appropriate epitaph for Reverend Bryant?

21. How were you affected by the scene of Reverend Bryant's funeral (scene 12)? What do you think the filmmaker intended to convey by ending the film with this scene? After viewing that scene, what images stand out in your memory?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

As you view the film, note the techniques the filmmaker employs to stimulate our response to Reverend Bryant's experiences. In each case consider the following questions:

a) How does this aspect of Reverend Bryant's life help us understand his character and values?

b) What scenes does the filmmaker employ to develop this aspect of Reverend Bryant's life? What images stand out in your memory when you think about those scenes?

c) How do those scenes affect your emotional response to Reverend Bryant's story?

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1) MUSIC:

2) RELIGION:

3) FAMILY:

4) THE PAST:

The Jogger

INTRODUCTION

Images of circles abound in humanistic films on aging: carousels are featured in *Don't Count the Candles*, *Roundabout*, and *One More Winter*, suggesting at once the eternal round of our existence as well as the aging person's continuing need to be put in touch with the wellsprings of passion and imagination. Other films incorporate circular imagery as a dominant part of the plot; the chain of circumstances leads older characters back to a former existence or previous set of relationships. Some of these characters are reinvigorated by the completion of the circle: the old woman in *The String-Bean*, having lost her precious bean plant, returns to her apartment and plants some of its seeds so that the cycle of life may begin again. Likewise, the young boy in *Death of a Gandy Dancer*, after experiencing the death of his grandfather, returns to the stand of maples near his house and taps the trees by himself as a sign that his grandfather's skills--and even more important, his values--have endured. But when characters fail to gain a sense of perspective on their actions, their circular existence becomes an ironic commentary on lost possibilities and broken dreams. Before the main character in *The Transformation of Mabel Wells* rediscovers her capacity for creativity and generosity, she is pictured as the "block character" who went "round and round" each day, angrily denouncing everyone in her path. The unfortunate character in *One-Eyed Men Are Kings* is shown at the beginning and at the ending of the film walking the streets of Paris alone, a lonely and forlorn figure, unable to renew the bonds of former friendships.

The main character in *The Jogger* is a cousin of the main character in *One-Eyed Men Are Kings*. In fact, he is Everyman (or more appropriately, every MAN), who never rises above viewing life with a series of labels and formulas. As he runs a circular jogging course in a city park, we hear the man's life review--divided into four distinct stages of his life--as a continuous interior monologue. At no time in the film do we see the man gain any insights into his life. In contrast, each segment of his monologue reinforces the dominant themes that have driven his existence: sex, power, fame, and success. At the same time, other feelings compete for his attention: fears of his physical decline, the need to be recognized and accepted, the need for love and affection, a sense of the infinite possibilities of life. But these secondary themes remain in the background. He ends his run where he began it: the only difference is that instead of being a man of twenty, now he is a man of seventy.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Ask your audience what they expect from a film that is titled *The Jogger.* Perhaps your audience can discuss some of the reasons why people run, especially people who jog on a regular basis. Tell your audience that the jogger in this film is a man. Are the reasons men run significantly

different from the reasons women run? Ask your audience to consider the connection between jogging and aging. Is anyone familiar with research on physiological or psychological changes in men and women because of their jogging?

2) If some of the members of your audience are runners, ask them what they think about when they run. Do they ever "review" aspects of their lives? Are there any patterns in that life review? What types of experiences, relationships, or values might recur when people have an opportunity to think about their lives for a continuous period of time? Ask your audience to notice the patterns in the main character's life review.

3) Ask your audience to watch for other patterns in the film, including references to the time of day, changing seasons, and different forms of clothing the main character is wearing. After viewing the film, your audience will be able to discuss some of the reasons the filmmaker incorporates these patterns.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

The film begins with a jarring note of music and the image of a bright green sign nailed to a tree: "Jogging Course--Start." A jogger, a man in his twenties, runs by. It is sunrise. We hear piano music in the background.

The entire film consists of images of the jogger running on this same course at different times of the day, different times of the year, and different times in his life. As he runs this course, we hear his thoughts as an interior monologue, as if he is talking to himself. The following summary will focus on his thoughts that occur as we see various images of him running the course.

1. The jogger, a man in his twenties, runs briskly down the jogging path on a cool spring morning.

   --"Nice and easy, Babe. We've got a long way to go."
   --"One of these days I'm going to get mugged doing this."
   --He considers going into business. "Big bucks, that's what that means, baby. It'll be worth it to them--I hope."
   --He recalls a woman he was in love with. "Catherine. I chased her four years. Jerk."
   --He recalls playing baseball in college, particularly a game his team lost to Harvard.
   --He thinks confidently that he could have played major league baseball. Then, with uncertainty in his voice, "I wonder if I really could have though. I loved it."
   --"Gotta keep moving--keep pushing."

2. The music changes abruptly, and we see the same man, older now, in his thirties. He is running with his shirt off in the bright sun of noonday in the summer.

- --He recalls Mickey, his childhood sweetheart. We see her image on the screen as he thinks, "I always thought I'd marry her. Then I could say, 'Yup, we used to be childhood sweethearts.' I always thought that was a neat thing to be. I think I'm still in love with her." Then he considers his wife's reaction to that opinion.
- --He thinks of a business deal. "Here I am committing myself and he's playing games with me."
- --"I always feel I can take on the world. Anything's possible. You gotta make it happen."
- --So much to do. And I want it all."

3. The music changes again, and we see the man, now in his fifties with gray hair. He is wearing a green jogging outfit, and he runs on the course in the late afternoon during a colorful fall day.

- --He thinks about his lover. "Wonder if I should call Sylvie. My God, she excites me." Then he thinks of his wife. "Sure I love her. I gotta call Sylvie. Just one more time. Don't worry about it, fella. But I do worry about it. I worry about it a lot inside."
- --"Wonder what the kids think about me, what they know about me."
- --"I know I can't stop. It's struggle, challenge, that keeps you alive--keeps me alive."
- --"Success, comfort, it's what I wanted and what I got. But it can kill you if you let it."
- --He recalls a football game in college when he made a big play.
- --He thinks it would be nice to have his son in the business. "I suppose I should have been willing to share with him more, maybe with everybody more."

4. We see the same man in his seventies, running slowly over snow at sunset. He wears a rust-colored jogging suit and heavy shoes.

- --He remembers his mother and father. He misses them. He recalls that they always came to see him play football.
- --"I can still move pretty good, damn it."
- --He fantasizes about young women chasing him. "It's my money they're after, I know."
- --He complains about his board of directors. "They think they can stop me now. It's still my baby, fellas. Just try to keep up with me."
- --"Nobody wants to work anymore. Why is that? Wish Bobby (his son) would come in with me."
- --He delights in spoiling his grandchildren. "Bet they have trouble thinking of me as a kid. Bet they don't think about it at all. I do."
- --We see the image of his childhood sweetheart again. "Yup, my first love. I'm still in love with that girl. I ought to give her a call. I haven't seen her in sixty years."

A jarring note of music sounds abruptly as he runs by the sign at the start of the course again. But now the sign is weathered and rotting. We hear one last thought as he runs by the sign: "One of these days I'm going to get mugged doing this."

--1977, Phoenix Films, 10 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. To what extent were you able to identify with the main character in this film? Did you admire him? Did you pity him? What does your response reveal about your own attitudes toward aging?

2. Do you think the film would have differed significantly if the main character had been a woman instead of a man? To what extent is the jogger the stereotypical "male," whose values are derived from a male-oriented and male-dominated society?

3. What patterns did you notice in the filmmaker's references to changes in the time of day and changes in the seasons? In each case, how do those references help us identify with the main character? What do those references have to do with the study of aging?

II. The Jogger: What Matters Most.

4. What are some of the values the main character seems to live by throughout his life? How are those values reinforced by his being a male, and not a female? How are those values reinforced by the process of aging he experiences?

5. What are the some of the thoughts that appear to stand out in the jogger's memory? What do those thoughts reveal about the jogger's character and values?

6. What does the jogger appear to be afraid of? Can you recall specific statements that suggest some of his specific fears?

7. What is the jogger's attitude toward his physical condition? Why does he continue to recall memories of playing football? How is his attitude toward his physical condition reflected in his choice of attire?

8. How would you characterize the jogger's attitude toward the world of business? When he thinks of business, or of making money, what additional thoughts make him feel uncomfortable?

III. The Jogger: Memories of Lost Loves.

9. When does the jogger first begin to remember Mickey, his childhood sweetheart? What do you think the filmmaker is trying to communicate by ending the film with the jogger's memory of the same young woman?

10. How would you characterize the jogger's relationship with his wife? In scene 1 he recalls, "I chased her four years. Jerk." What do you think he means by saying, "Jerk"?

11. In scene 3, he refers to Sylvie. Who do you think she is? What does he mean when he says, "I gotta call Sylvie. Don't worry about it. But I do worry about it. I worry about it a lot inside"?

12. The first time the jogger thinks of his son is in scene 3, when he is a man in his fifties. Why does he think of his son at this point? How would you characterize his relationship to his son?

IV. General Questions.

13. When he thinks of his grandchildren in scene 4, he notes, "Bet they have trouble thinking of me as a kid. Bet they don't think about it at all. I do." What do you think he means by this statement?

14. What do you think the filmmaker meant to convey by interrupting the action in scene 4 with a jarring musical note as the jogger ran past the start of the course again?

15. What do you think the filmmaker meant to convey by focusing the camera on the weathered and rotting sign for the jogging trail at the end of the film?

16. Can you recall specific pattern to the changes in the jogger's attire, as it appeared in each of the scenes? What do you think the filmmaker was trying to communicate by establishing this pattern?

17. When the jogger was a young man, how do you think he expected life to turn out? When he was an older man, to what extent do you think he was surprised by the outcome of his life?

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

As you view the film, note that four stages of the jogger's life are highlighted; we see him running the course as a man in his 20's, 30's, 50's, and 70's. Those ages are listed below. Before you view the film, read the questions below. After you have viewed the film, list some of the responses to these questions under the appropriate ages of the jogger.

a) What do his memories in this section reveal about the jogger's character and values?

b) What do his memories in this section reveal about the jogger's attitude toward his own aging or to the aging process?

c) To what extent is the jogger a different person in each of the later sections? To what extent is he the same person in each of the sections?

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1) The Jogger: A Man in His Twenties:

2) The Jogger: A Man in His Thirties:

3) The Jogger: A Man in His Fifties:

4) The Jogger: A Man in His Seventies:

INTRODUCTION

The Last Winters begins as a simple, unpretentious story of the relationship between two older people, residents of a county rest home, who have known each other for more than three years. One morning Marguerite leaves on an errand, without telling Charles where she is going. Later, he sets out to find her. Uncertain about her motives, he wanders through the city, and as we follow him on his day-long search, we come to realize the insecurity that is at the core of his relationship to Marguerite. Like a young lover, he experiences feelings of jealousy, resentment, and anger toward her. When he finds her at the end of the day, he demands an immediate accounting of her time alone. But she reminds him of their upcoming anniversary and tells him of the presents she bought for him. He is stunned, partly because he had forgotten that date. She smiles knowingly at this lapse of memory, and the two walk arm in arm onto the grounds of the rest home. The narrator announces somberly that six months later Marguerite died, and Charles died two years, two months, and eight days later.

Although the relationship of Charles and Marguerite appears to be the basis of the film's story, the development of their relationship is limited to a few scenes in a flashback, which incorporate Charles' recollection of their first meeting and scenes from their early relationship. Instead of staying with the main characters' experience, the filmmaker incorporates the point of view of more than a score of anonymous characters who appear briefly as Charles makes his way through the city. Faces in the crowd, these characters speak their random thoughts as they go about their daily activity. Their thoughts are dominated by their hopes, dreams, fears, jealousy, anger, and petty concerns. The prevailing response to life depicted in these scenes is that of insecurity. Characters appear isolated, not interacting with other people, the basis of their existence the insecurity that drives them relentlessly. Charles, too, is driven by his doubts about Marguerite, and his lack of trust in her judgment suggests his inability to embrace life fully on its own terms.

Marguerite possesses characteristics that distinguish her from all the other characters. In contrast to Charles and the other anonymous characters around him, Marguerite engages life and commits herself to actions that are meaningful and of lasting value. She buys gifts, she makes plans, she expresses a willingness to explore their relationship in more depth. Charles lacks this power of self-determination and sense of engagement with life in the present. A lonely man before he met Marguerite, he reveals himself to be a lonely man again throughout the action in the film. His dependency on Marguerite is the one fact that reminds us of the self-imposed limitations that hinder his development as a character.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Prepare you audience for viewing this film by noting that the dialogue is in French, with English subtitles. Note that although the film compares

the experiences of two older people who live in a senior citizens' residence, most of the action emphasizes the interior response of one of the two characters, Charles, by listening to his thoughts as he makes his way through the city. Viewers may find it difficult to follow this "interior monologue" unless they can see the screen easily. Ask viewers to concentrate as well on the images that accompany the monologue.

2) Viewers interested in film art will find many examples of subtle, provocative editing in this film:

-- Viewers should watch for scenes in which the filmmaker comments on Charles' state of mind by incorporating the private thoughts of strangers, once in a doctor's waiting room, and later on the street, at a subway exit. In each case Charles' loneliness and aimlessness is reinforced by the similar emotions expressed by most of the strangers.

-- Several images show strangers standing in doorways or behind windows, caught for a moment by the camera's objective lens and suggesting the complexity and mystery that lies at the heart of all people. These images suggest that Charles' story cannot be understood superficially; for there is a depth in human character and interpersonal relationships we often miss. Furthermore, these images may suggest the isolation and loneliness of most people (including Charles). In effect, people are shown throughout the film trapped within this isolation, unable to reach out and establish meaningful interpersonal relationships.

-- In several scenes we see flashbacks of Charles' and Marguerite's earlier relationship, giving us some perspective on how they met and why their relationship developed. Each of these glances into the past, depicted from Charles' point of view, reveals Charles' intense need for Marguerite, who offered him both affection and security.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. Several older people leave a senior citizens' residence in France. One of them, Marguerite, looks around her as she departs. We follow her for some time, hearing some of her thoughts as she strides purposefully down the street. At one point she thinks, "The face of Charles when he finds out I'm gone."

2. Another older person, Charles, leaves from the same gate at the residence. As he walks down the street, we hear his thoughts, too. "Why didn't she wait for me?" We follow him among a crowd. Suddenly the filmmaker highlights one after the other of these strangers in the crowd, all expressing their individual and private thoughts. From their points of view we hear their random thoughts, each expressed in turn: one man for is worried about

being late for an appointment, another is worried about overeating and losing her sexual appeal, another is thinking about butter, another worries about a love affair. Two images of people standing silently behind windows in a building are added to these scenes. Charles passes them and continues down the streets of town, looking for Marguerite.

3. He arrives at a doctor's office, thinking she may have had an appointment. Inside the doctor's office, the filmmaker again allows us to hear the internalized thoughts of a diverse set of people: we listen to a woman worrying about a love affair, a man taking pride in his son's accomplishment, a woman objecting to another patient's choice of clothes, a woman afraid that no one will ever kiss her, and a woman who wants to be the first to see the doctor. Then we return to Charles' thoughts: he realizes Marguerite is not there, and he leaves.

4. Charles continues his search. After we hear more thoughts of people on the street, Charles notices a man across the street. He realizes the man used to tune his piano. But Charles does not call out to him. As Charles walks, we hear his thoughts: "I'll kill her!" Two images of people standing behind windows are edited into the scene.

   Charles stops at a full-length mirror against a shop wall, and as he looks at himself in the mirror, we begin a flashback--from Charles' point of view--of the first time he met Marguerite several years before. We see him following her on the street. Of course, she doesn't recognize him because he is a stranger, but when he persists in following her, she begins to laugh. She stops, and he admits that he thought he recognized her as someone else. When she leaves him, he follows again. When she stops again, he admits, "I really wanted to talk to somebody." As the flashback continues, we see her laugh and say, "When a man makes me laugh, I'll forgive him anything."

5. We see the new-found friends, still in the flashback, enjoying lunch in a terrace cafe. We learn that her husband left her, and Charles tells her that he is a widower. We see them together the next day. They walk together along a small lake in the city, and as they approach a park bench, a young couple, seated on the bench, with their arms around each other, look up and see the older couple. The young couple stands up, and the young man offers the park bench to Charles and Marguerite. The two sit down close to each other.

6. Charles continues to recall in the flashback a time when he feigned illness in order to have Marguerite take care of him. We see him in Marguerite's apartment, enjoying her gentleness and her good cooking. She tucks him in bed and stays with him. Then we hear him recall that he was with Marguerite for three years.

7. Back to the present. Charles is seated on a step, looking morose. "I shouldn't be sentimental," he thinks. More private thoughts of strangers who pass Charles on the street: a policeman worries about money; a man who stops outside of church and the nearby cemetery walks past Charles and tells him, "They're all dead"; a young woman buys a gun in a shop and thinks of killing her boyfriend." Charles continues walking back to the senior citi-

zens' residence. The filmmaker again highlights thoughts of people coming up from the subway. Most of their thoughts reflect their many fears.

8. Charles sees Marguerite in the crowd. Jealous and angry, he stops her. She reminds him that their anniversary is Saturday. He is shocked. They walk for a while. She tells him she bought him a camera. She also sold her watch, and she plans to knit him a sweater. He tells her he was afraid that she had an accident. She smiles. They return to the residence, hand in hand. As the reenter the gate, a narrator explains that six months later Marguerite died and that Charles died two years, two months, and eight days later.

--1980, Coronet-Perspective Films, 23 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. In what ways were the two characters, Charles and Marguerite, different? How did the filmmaker reinforce those differences in the film?

2. Which of the two characters, Charles or Marguerite, were you able to identify with (or relate to) more clearly?

II. Charles and Marguerite.

3. What was your impression of Marguerite the first time you saw her (scene 1)? Where did you think she was going?

4. What do you think was the basis of Charles and Marguerite's relationship? How does the action in the film help you understand their relationship?

5. When Charles begins to remember the first time he met Marguerite (scene 4), what did you think was unusual about the way the two people met? What did their first meeting reveal about Charles?

6. Why did the filmmaker include the scene of the young couple on the park bench (scene 5), who stand up and invite the older couple to be seated?

7. What was revealed about Charles' character in scene 6, when he feigned illness in order to have Marguerite take care of him? Do you think Marguerite knew that he was feigning illness? If so, why didn't she refuse to take care of him?

8. When the flashback ends (scene 7), Charles thinks, "I shouldn't be sentimental." Do you think he was being sentimental?

9. When Charles finally spots Marguerite, why is he so angry? How did you react when he told her he was afraid that she had had an accident?

10. Why did the filmmaker conclude the film with the reference to Marguerite's death three years later and then to Charles' death more than two years after that? Did that ending help you understand the basis of their relationship?

III. Faces in the Crowd.

11. What was the filmmaker trying to convey by incorporating the many private thoughts of various strangers throughout the film? What did their experiences have to do with Charles' experience?

12. Several times in the film you saw images of strangers standing silently behind windows. What do you think the filmmaker intended to convey by using these images? Why didn't the filmmaker include their private thoughts, too?

13. Did you think there was a pattern to the thoughts of these stangers in the crowd? If so, how did those thoughts help us understand Charles' situation?

14. When Charles recognizes one of the people on the street as a man who used to tune his piano years ago, why doesn't he stop and say hello? What does his action reveal about his character?

15. Could the filmmaker have told his story about Charles and Marguerite without including these scenes in which various strangers speak their private thoughts?

IV. General Questions.

16. What do you think is this film's primary audience? What aspects of the film's techniques, plot, and characterizations relate it to that particular audience?

17. What are some of the universal qualities of human beings and/or human nature this film attempts to address? To what extent is the film not about the experience of "older people"?

INTRODUCTION

The Silver Maiden appears to portray a simple encounter between two strangers--a stately, attractive older woman and an ill-tempered, irascible older man--who meet by chance on their daily outing in the park. Sitting next to each other on the same park bench, the two discover after conversing briefly that they have some things in common: both are Chilean, both lived in or near Santiago when they were younger, and both know the details of a failed love affair between Laura Llorente, the governor's daughter, a remarkable beauty known as the "Silver Maiden," and Don Gonzalez Tiesco, a young man her family thought far beneath her. They share their versions of the "truth" about their relationship, make plans to visit the park the next day, and express an interest in talking to each other again.

This brief summary of the action, however, does not begin to express all that happens in this subtle, evocative film. What appears to be a chance encounter actually is a profound reunion, for the two people sitting next to each other on this park bench are Laura Llorente and Don Gonzalez Tiesco--the very same couple whose love affair from the past has been the subject of their conversation. Only one of the two, in this case Laura, knows the truth behind their identities. But when she discovers that the irritable old man sitting next to her is her former lover, she withholds this knowledge from him, and the audience is given the opportunity to watch the couple uncover the rich tapestry of their shared experiences from the past. As they recite the details of Laura and Don Gonzalez' relationship, long unresolved conflicts and repressed feelings surface and are communicated for the first time in a non-threatening environment. Before their brief conversation has ended, both have been able to explain some of the circumstances that dictated the course of their experiences and to express some of the values that are an integral part of their characters. At the end of the film viewers are left with some thoughts about the fragile nature of human relationships as well as a sense of perspective on the enduring quality of love as the basis of human relationships.

As the truth about their past begins to emerge, we conclude that both Laura and Don Gonzalez failed to communicate with each other in the past because of their pride and stubbornness, because of rash judgments that soon hardened and became inflexible, or because circumstances prevented them from being able to reach out to each other in some way and resolve their differences. Their present communication reminds, us, then, of the many lost opportunities in their two lives, which have left them alone, embittered, but still proud. When Laura recounts the death of her husband, Don Gonzalez says, "She must have taken it badly." Laura reveals the essence of her character when she says, speaking of herself, "She survived. She was determined." Here is a statement of values that reveals the common bond Laura and Don Gonzalez share: although both have repressed for a lifetime the painful, even tragic memories attached to their failed relationship, both are survivors, and having resolved some long-unanswered questions about their past relationship, they will work toward establishing a new relationship based on what they now have in common between them.

PRE-VIEWING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

1) Because of the nature of the film's story--an unexpected reunion between two former lovers--do not tell your audience any details of the story so that they can experience firsthand the surprising developments in the plot. You may want to note that the film offers an interesting perspective on some universal human emotions. Note that everyone in the audience will be able to identify--in some way--with the interaction between the two main characters.

2) Tell your audience that this film highlights a conversation between two older characters. Ask them to concentrate on the dynamics of that conversation: What factors inhibit their conversation? What factors keep the conversation moving?

3) Note that the musical background plays a significant role in the narrative; that is, at important points in the film music is added in order to move the story forward. Ask your audience to listen for these musical interludes and ask them to consider what role the music plays in helping viewers understand and/or empathize with the relationship between the two main characters.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

1. We see an attractive older woman seated on a park bench, while a young woman in a nurse's uniform stands over her, looking like a guard in a museum. The older woman, Mrs. Esconcido, sends her on an errand, telling her, "If I start dying, I will call you, and you can come, watch, and report."

2. In the next scene we see an older man, Mr. Tiesco, walking in the park with a young man who is paid to be his companion. But Mr. Tiesco is an irascible old man who resents many of the people around him. The young man makes an excuse that he is late for class, and Mr. Tiesco grudgingly allows him to leave.

3. The two scenes come together when Mr. Tiesco approaches the park bench where Mrs. Esconcido is seated, feeding the pigeons. He chases the birds away and mutters under his breath about their filthy behavior. He sits apart from her on the long bench. She ignores his rudeness and asks him about the book he is reading. Soon they discover both are Chilean, and she is from Santiago.

4. Mrs. Esconcido proposes a truce between them, but when she mentions Pablo Neruda, the famous Chilean poet, he complains that the man was a communist.

Her opinion of Mr. Tiesco: under her breath she calls him a fascist.

They sit quietly for a moment. Then we hear the strains of a romantic song in the background. Suddenly he begins to reminisce about the time he used to go into Santiago as a young man to visit a woman named Laura Llorente, the Governor's daughter.

5. Mrs. Esconcido reacts with a look of surprise. She claims she was Laura's neighbor and recalls Laura was known as the "Silver Maiden" because she was so beautiful. Mr. Tiesco agrees, and as he describes her features, we notice Mrs. Esconcido smiling inwardly, remembering. She is the Silver Maiden!

   Mr. Tiesco begins to tell about his relationship with Laura, but he changes his story slightly: it was his cousin Gonzalez who knew Laura. "She broke his heart," he declares. But we know he is talking about his relationship with Laura.

6. Laura (Mrs. Esconcido) argues, "It wasn't true. It was he." Mr. Tiesco wonders how she can be so sure. Of course, she hurriedly explains that the story was well known by many people in the city.

   The two continue to recite the details of the affair, based on Laura's "hearsay" and Mr. Tiesco's "cousin" as their sources. Mr. Tiesco calls his cousin "a prince among men," but Laura says Laura's parents thought him a "scoundrel"; Mr. Tiesco recalls that after fighting a duel over Laura, his cousin fled to Brazil and wrote to Laura from his refuge, but Laura says, "It was a year before a letter arrived." They trade more information about the two people. We learn that the cousin lived with another woman, who left him eventually for a younger man. Laura eloped with a Spaniard, a man her family thought far beneath her. Mr. Tiesco asks, "Do you know if they are still married?" She tells him Laura's husband died in the Spanish Civil War. "She must have taken it badly," he offers. But Laura reveals her true feelings as Laura when she responds, "She survived. She was determined." We learn that Laura never remarried. Mr. Tiesco says that his cousin moved away "to escape the memories."

8. "It's odd, isn't it?" Laura says. "Here are you and I, complete strangers, discussing your cousin and my neighbor, talking as freely as old friends." She asks him if he will be in the park tomorrow. He says, "I'm a busy man. I have many friends." But he expresses an interest in returning. She turns to him, "Laura must have found it easy to love . . . your cousin, if he was charming as you." He accepts her compliment, but he calls himself "an irritable old man." They make plans for tomorrow's visit. When he leaves, she says to herself, "Good-bye, Gonzalez de Tiesco" (her lover's name) and smiles. She remains on the park bench, and now we hear the same song played throughout their conversation, sung by the female vocalist Judy Collins. Some of the words: "We looked at each other in the same way the, but I can't remember where or when . . . Things that happened for the first time, seem to be happening again. And so it seems that we have met before, and laughed before, and loved before . . . but who knows where or when."

--1981, Carousel Films, 12 min.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. Discussion Starters.

1. What was your impression of the two main characters when you saw them in the first two scenes? Did your opinion of them change as the film continued?

2. When the film ended, what did you think would happen in this relationship? How did you want the relationship to turn out?

II Keeping Secrets.

3. When did you first realize Mrs. Esconcido was the "Silver Maiden"? Why didn't she tell Mr. Tiesco right away?

4. Why did Mr. Tiesco say it was his cousin who knew Laura, rather than admitting that he was her lover?

5. When Mrs. Escondido tells Mr. Tiesco Laura's husband was killed in the Spanish Civil War, he offers his sympathy, and she says, "She survived. She was determined." What does Mrs. Escondido reveal about herself with this response?

6. Do you think Mr. Tiesco ever suspects that Mrs. Escondido is actually the "Silver Maiden"?

III The Meaning of the Past.

7. Was it every clear to you as you watched the film why the two young lovers in the past separated?

8. What questions does the film raise about our ability to uncover the "truth" of relationships in the past?

9. Do you think either Mrs. Escondido or Mr. Tiesco have accepted the events of the past as they understand them?

IV. General Questions.

10. Can you remember points in their interaction when the conversation seemed ready to end? What made them keep talking?

11. What do you think the filmmaker meant to convey by including the music from the song "Where or When" in the film?

12. What are some of the obstacles to their developing a relationship in the present? Do you think they will be able to overcome these obstacles?

13. When do you think Laura first realizes Mr.Tiesco is actually her old lover?

RECOMMENDED AUDIENCES:

NAME OF FILM:	pre-school	elementary	junior high	senior high	college	adults	older adults
The Detour				x	x	x	x
Dolly				x	x	x	x
Dying: Reverend Bryant			x	x	x	x	x
The Jogger				x	x	x	x
The Last Winters					x	x	x
The Silver Maiden			x	x	x	x	x

	The Detour	Dolly	Dying: Rev. Bryant	The Jogger	The Last Winters	The Silver Maiden
ageism: dispel myths	x					x
counseling/psychology		x	x	x		
cultural diversity			x		x	x
death/grief education	x	x	x			x
ethical issues	x	x		x		
family relationships		x	x	x		
film study/film art	x	x	x	x	x	
intergenerational		x	x			
loneliness of old age		x		x	x	x
men's roles		x	x	x	x	x
mental health prog.		x		x		
minorities and aging			x			
religious education			x			
responses to loss	x	x	x			x
sexuality	x	x		x		
stereotypes of aging		x			x	
urban aging			x	x	x	x
values education	x		x	x		
women's roles	x	x	x		x	x

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED FILMS

All Your Parts Don't Wear Out At the Same Time
Mass Media Ministries, 1978, 28 min.

This upbeat film features the experiences of seven people over sixty-five who become members of a theatrical group, working under the direction of an experienced teacher. The group was formed "to challenge stereotypes of aging," and as we follow their progress from try-outs through clips from several performances in schools and community settings, they accomplish their aims with energy and flair. The group draws on their collective experiences for the subjects of their performances; often the staging incorporates a form of life review or oral history.

Another dimension of life review is added, however, when the filmmaker examines the lives of each of the seven participants. We discover that each has his or her own story to tell, and we gain insights into their pasts through their reminiscences, through old photographs, and through the comments of their theatrical director, who establishes deep friendships with all members of the group. The film succeeds partly in revealing the individuality and richness of character of each of the seven participants, but it is less successful when it attempts to utilize the experiences of the acting group as a means of generalizing about the status of older people in our society. The theatrical director's visit to a gerontology professor seems particularly contrived. In fact, their conversation touches on obvious ideas: they conclude that most programs treat older people in a passive way, and the key to successful aging is to realize that "activity follows function." Although the message of the film sometimes seems heavy-handed, its appeal can be traced to its portrait of seven vital and interesting older people who undertake an exciting experiment in group theatre and make it work. The film is accessible to a wide audience, ranging from junior high to adults, and it may serve as a primer for tapping the creative talents of older people.

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall
Perspective Films, 1977, 57 min.

Based on an excellent 1927 short story by Katherine Anne Porter, The Jilting of Granny Weatherall presents the actions of one day in the life of the title character. The day is a special one to Granny--in fact, an anniversary--for many years before, when she still was a young woman, Granny was jilted by her lover on this day. The filmmaker attempts to convey the psychological torment Granny experiences as she recalls the details of that fateful day many years ago. Throughout the film we see images of Granny's lover riding out to the young woman's house that night. But he turns away at the last minute, afraid of the commitment required of him. In the present we see Granny as an old woman, embittered and isolated from members of her family, acting out a bizarre reunion. For on this day Granny relives in her imagination the same day she spent waiting for her lover to come years earlier, baking and cleaning and planning a party. But she tells no one the reasons for her unusual behavior, leaving her daughter and her family confused and troubled.

The short story definitely provides the ingredients for a compelling psychological study, but the filmed version of the story lacks the subtlety of the written version. Granny's unresolved grief surfaces again and again in the film, but viewers never gain sufficient insights into the basis of her relationship with the lover who jilted her in order to comprehend the depth of her unremitting anger at his act. The ending of the film appears somewhat long and drawn out as well, and Granny's eventual death is presented too melodramatically to be convincing. Perhaps the film would be most useful in the context of the study of literature in a high school or college setting.

Minnie Remembers

Mass Media Ministries, 1976, 5 min.

The character in this film is an old woman, seated in a rocking chair, apparently alone in a room. As the film begins we hear her voice, as if she is talking to herself, and see her sitting quietly in the chair. She looks down at her hands, and we hear her voice: "God, my hands are old. I was so proud of them once. They were so soft. Now the softness is like worn-out shoes." Then an extreme closeup of her hands, and her voice continues: "When did these slender, graceful hands become gnarled? When, God? They lie here in my lap, reminders of my worn-out body." This summary of the opening scene suggests some of the strengths and weaknesses of this brief film. Its greatest strength is that it forces viewers to look at the old person and to see that person as an individual--not as a type. Some of the images provide a strong emotional impact on viewers: her hands in this scene, her noble face in later scenes, the image of Minnie seated in the rocking chair against a black background. But the extensive use of flashbacks, showing a younger Minnie enjoying her life with her family, are unrealistic, romanticized portraits of a person's past. These brief flashbacks do not help viewers identify with Minnie. The overly poetic, and sometimes melodramatic narration also undermines the richness of the images of Minnie alone in her chair. Sometimes the comments she makes only repeat the obvious message the filmmaker intended; for instance, after several of the flashbacks, we return to the lonely woman only to hear her say to herself, "Oh, God. I'm so lonely."

Not all of the narration is equally redundant. Some of her words provide thought-provoking commentary on how little older people are valued in our society at times. But those who use this film will have to sort through the excessive sentiment in order to glean appropriate responses to the insights being provided.

The Women of Hodson

Filmmaker's Library, 1980, 30 min.

This film documents the participation of several older women in a theatrical group in the Hodson Senior Center, the Bronx, New York. Their young drama instructor is shown rehearsing them and offering constructive suggestions in several scenes. Her objective is "to validate the experience of being a senior citizen." After six months of rehearsals, the group begins performances at other senior centers. Scenes of their performances reveal some of their innovative responses to drama. As one of the players says late in the film, "They say don't live in your memories. But we reminisce. Old people do." With the aid of their instructor, the cast turns their own experiences into the stuff of drama. As the instructor says, "As a group we tried to understand what had happened for them over seventy-five years and put it in a context where we can share it with other people. This work is a collective vision."

The film succeeds at what it sets out to accomplish because it emphasizes the women's participation in theatre. Unlike the film _All Your Parts Don't Wear Out at the Same Time_, which also documents the formation of a theatrical group, the filmmaker of _The Women of Hodson_ does not complicate the film by attempting to highlight the life stories of each participant or by stating far-reaching generalizations based on their theatrical experience. The film appears to make one point very well. When the creative talents of older people are engaged appropriately, the rewards are clear: participants feel a renewed sense of vigor and self-worth. A film like _The Women of Hodson_ exemplifies these rewards, and it may be useful in stimulating further creative experiments in senior citizens centers or other settings.

COMPLETE LIST OF FILMS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

(nr.) = The film appears in the number of the chapter noted within parentheses.

* = The film is featured as one of the primary films in its chapter; otherwise, it is included in the section Additional Recommended Films at the end of a chapter.

All Your Parts Don't Wear Out at the Same Time (5)
Mass Media Ministries, 1980, 28 min.

Angus (1)
National Film Board of Canada, 1971, 13 min.

Annie and the Old One (3)
Phoenix Films / BFA Educational Media, 1975, 15 min.

The Antique Collector (1)*
Barr Films, 1980, 29 min.

Antonia: Portrait of a Woman (2)
Phoenix Films, 1974, 58 min.

The Art of Age (2)*
LSB Productions, 1972, 27 min.

Arthur and Lillie (2)
Pyramid Films, 1976, 30 min.

At 99: A Portrait of Louise Tandy Murch (2)*
Sunrise Films, 1974, 25 min.

Birch Canoe Builder (2)
Aims Media, 1971, 23 min.

The Blessings of Love (1)*
Films, Inc., 1971, 9 min.

Bloomers (3)
Perspective Films, 1980, 27 min.

Chillysmith Farm (3)
Filmmakers Library, 1981, 55 min.

Close Harmony (3)*
Learning Corporation of America, 1981, 28 min.

Crac! (1)
    Pyramid Films, 1981, 10 min.

David and Bert (2)
    National Film Board of Canada, 1977, 27 min.

Death of a Gandy Dancer (3)*
    Learning Corporation of America, 1977, 26 min.

The Detour (5)*
    Phoenix Films, 1977, 13 min.

Dolly (5)*
    Phoenix Films, 1976, 10 min.

Don't Count the Candles (1)*
    CBS Broadcast International, 1968, 54 min. FOR PURCHASE ONLY

Don't Mess With Bill (2)*
    Wombat Productions, 1980, 11 min.

A Dream About a House (1)
    CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 1973, 16 min.

Dudley Carter (2)
    Abby Sher Productions, 1982, 58 min.

Dying
    Novacom, 1976, 97 min.
    Harriet and Bill (4)* 24 min.
    Reverend Bryant (5)* 47 min.
    Sally (4)* 18 min.

Feiz, the Last Expert (1)
    Zagreb Films, 1973, 15 min.

The Final Proud Days of Elsie Wurster (4)
    Pennsylvania State Audio Visual Services, 1975, 58 min.

For Gentlemen Only (4)*
    Wombat Productions, 1977, 28 min.

Forever Young (2)
    Learning Corporation of America, 1981, 58 min.

Generations (3)
    Phoenix Films, 1979, 11 min.

The Giving Tree (1)*
    Stephen Bosustow Productions, 1973, 10 min.

Golden Age (4)
University of Southern California, School of Cinema/Television, 1980, 20 min.

Grieving: Suddenly Alone (4)*
University of Southern California, School of Cinema/Television, 1982, 28 min.

Hailey's Gift (1)
Learning Corporation of America, 1978, 23 min.

Halvor Landsverk: Woodcarver (2)
University of Minnesota, 1973, 30 min.

Home For Christmas (1)*
Centron Films, 1981, 11 min.

Home to Stay (3)*
Time-Life Films, 1978, 48 min.

How Could I Not Be Among You? (4)
Eccentric Circle Workshop, 1973, 28 min.

The Hundred Penny Box (3)*
Churchill Films, 1979, 18 min.

Imogen Cunningham: Photographer (2)
Time-Life Films, 1972, 20 min.

Inside and Outside (1)
Iowa University Audiovisual Center, 1969, 29 min., b & w

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall (5)
Coronet-Perspective Films, 1980, 57 min.

The Jogger (5)*
Phoenix Films, 1977, 10 min.

The Keymaker (1)
University of Southern California, 1970, 20 min.

Last Stand Farmer (2)*
Silo Cinema, 1975, 25 min.

The Last Winters (5)*
Coronet-Perspective Films, 1980, 23 min.

Lila (2)*
Ideas and Images, 1980, 28 min.

The Lost Phoebe (4)
Perspective Films, 1974, 30 min.

Love it Like a Fool (2)*
New Day Film Co-op, Inc., 1977, 28 min.

Luther Metke at 94 (2)*
New Dimension Films, 1978, 27 min.

The Mailbox (4)*
Brigham Young University, 1977, 24 min.

Mandy's Grandmother (3)
Phoenix Films, 1978, 30 min.

Martin the Cobbler (4)*
Billy Budd Films, 1977, 28 min.

Me and Stella (2)
Phoenix Films, 1977, 24 min.

Minnie Remembers (5)
Mass Media Ministries, 1976, 5 min.

Mister Story (2)
Phoenix Films, 1973, 27 min.

The Mortal Body (1)
Filmmakers Library, 1976, 12 min., b & w

Murita Cycles (2)*
Direct Cinema, Ltd., 1979, 28 min.

Nell and Fred (2)*
CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 1971, 28 min., b & w

Number Our Days (4)
Hackford / Littman Films, 1976, 29 min.

An Old Box (Une Vieille Boite) (1)
National Film Board of Canada, 1975, 5 min.

The Old Woman (1)
Aims Media, 1974, 2 min.

One-Eyed Men Are Kings (4)*
CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 1974, 15 min.

One More Winter (3)*
Films, Inc., 1976, 15 min.

The Parting (4)*
Wombat Productions, 1973, 16 min.

Passing Quietly Through (4)
Grove Films, 1970, 20 min., b & w

Peege (3)*
Phoenix Films, 1973, 28 min.

Piece of Cake (4)*
Learning Corporation of America, 1981, 24 min.

Portrait of Grandpa Doc (3)*
Phoenix Films, 1977, 28 min.

Portraits of Aging (2)
Centron Films, 1978, 29 min.

A Private Life (4)*
Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1980, 31 min.

Rose By Any Other Name (4)
Adelphi University Center on Aging, 1979, 15 min.

Roundabout (1)*
Churchill Films, 1978, 19 min.

Ruth Stout's Garden (2)*
Arthur Mokin Productions, 1976, 23 min.

Secrets (1)
Filmmakers Library, 1979, 8 min.

The Shopping Bag Lady (3)
Learning Corporation of America, 1975, 21 min.

The Silver Maiden (5)*
Carousel Films, 1981, 12 min.

Sourwood Mountain Dulcimers (2)
Appalshop Films, 1977, 28 min.

Spike: A Montana Horseman (2)*
Learning Corporation of America, 1977, 11 min.

Sticky My Fingers, Fleet My Feet (1)
Time-Life Films, 1970, 23 min.

The Street (4)
National Film Board of Canada, 1976, 10 min.

The String-Bean (1)*
CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 1964, 17 min.

Sunshine's On My Way (3)
Learning Corporation of America, 1981, 30 min.

Thank You, Ma'm (3)*
Phoenix Films, 1976, 12 min.

Tomorrow Again (4)
Pyramid Films, 1972, 16 min., b & w

The Transformation of Mabel Wells (4)
Xerox Films, 1975, 12 min.

The Violin (3)
Learning Corporation of America, 1973, 25 min.

Weekend (1)*
Mass Media Associates, 1973, 12 min.

Why Me? (4)
National Film Board of Canada, 1976, 9 min.

The Wild Goose (1)*
Films, Inc., 1975, 19 min.

The Women of Hodson (5)
Filmmakers Library, 1980, 30 min.

Yonder Come Day (2)*
CRM / McGraw-Hill Films, 1975, 26 min.

Youth, Maturity, Old Age, Death (1)
Encyclopedia Brittanica Educational Corporation, 1975, 8 min.

Adelphi Univ. Multidisciplinary
Center on Aging
Garden City, NY 11530
516-486-4530

Aims Media
6901 Woodley Ave.
Van Nuys, CA 91406-4878
800-367-2467

Appalshop Films
306 Madison St.
P.O. Box 743
Whitesburg, KY 41858
606-633-0108

Barr Films
3490 East Foothill Blvd.
P.O. Box 5667
Pasadena, CA 91107
213-681-6978

Steven Bosustow Productions
1649 11th St.
Santa Monica, CA 90404
213-394-0218

Brigham Young Univ. AV Services
290 Herald R. Clark Bldg.
Provo, UT 84602
801-378-2713

Billy Budd Films
235 East 57th St.
New York, NY 10022
212-755-3968

Carousel Films
241 E. 34th St.
New York, NY 10016
212-683-1660

CBS Broadcast International
CBS Educational and Professional
Publishing
A Division of CBS, Inc.
383 Madison Ave.
New York, NY 10017
212-872-2000

Centron Films
Dist. by Simon & Schuster
Communications
108 Wilmot Road
Deerfield, IL 60015
800-621-2131

Churchill Films
662 N. Robertson Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90069-9990
800-334-7830 213-657-5110

Coronet-Perspective Films
Dist. by Simon & Schuster
Communications
108 Wilmot Road
Deerfield, IL 60015
800-621-2131

CRM / McGraw-Hill Films
McGraw-Hill Training Systems
P.O. Box 641
Del Mar, CA 92014
619-453-5000

Direct Cinema, Ltd.
P.O. Box 69589
Los Angeles, CA 90069
213-656-4770

Eccentric Circle Workshop
Dist. by Benchmark Films
145 Scarborough Road
Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510
914-762-3838

Encyclopedia Brittanica Educ. Corp.
425 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60611
800-558-6968

Filmmakers Library
133 E. 58th St.
New York, NY 10022
212-355-6545

Films, Inc.
1213 Wilmette Ave.
Wilmette, IL 60091
800-323-4222

Franciscan Communications Center
1229 S. Santee St.
Los Angeles, CA 90015
213-746-2916

Grove Press Films
196 West Houston St.
New York, NY 10014
212-242-4900

Hackford / Littman Films
6620 Cahuenga Terrace
Los Angeles, CA 90068
213-461-9433

Ideas and Images, Inc.
P.O. Box 5354
Atlanta, GA 30307
404-523-8023

Learning Corporation of America
Dist. by Simon & Schuster
Communications
108 Wilmot Road
Deerfield, IL 60015
800-621-2131

LSB Productions
1310 Monaco
Pacific Palisades, CA 90272
213-208-8836

Mass Media Associates
P.O. Box 427
Stewartstown, PA 17363
301-727-3270

Mass Media Ministries
Films and Video
2116 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218
301-727-3270

Arthur Mokin Productions
2900 McBride Lane
Santa Rosa, CA 95401
707-542-4868

Museum of Modern Art
Circulating Film Library
11 West 53rd St.
New York, NY 10019
212-708-9530

National Film Board of Canada
16th Floor
1251 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020-1173
212-586-5131

New Day Film Co-op, Inc.
22 Riverview Dr.
Wayne, NJ 07470-3191
201-633-0212 201-628-9111

New Dimension Films
85895 Lorane Highway
Eugene, OR 97405
503-484-7125

Novacom, Inc.
Distribution Center
125 Western Ave.
Boston, MA 02134
617-492-2777 617-783-1698

Pennsylvania State University
Audio-Visual Services
Special Services Building
University Park, PA 16802
814-865-6314

Perspective Films
Dist. by Simon & Schuster
Communications
108 Wilmot Road
Deerfield, IL 60015
800-621-2131

Phoenix Films and Video, Inc.
468 Park Ave. South
New York, NY 10157
212-684-5910

Phoenix Films / BFA Educ. Media
468 Park Ave. South
New York, NY 10157
212-684-5910

Pyramid Films
P.O. Box 1048
Santa Monica, CA 90406
213-828-7577

Silo Cinema
10 Beach St.
New York, NY 10013
212-925-8877

Sunrise Films
Dist. by Journal Films, Inc.
930 Pitner
Evanston, IL 60202
800-323-5448 312-328-6700

Time-Life Video Distribution Center
100 Eisenhower Dr.
P.O. Box 644
Paramus, NJ 07653
201-843-4545

University of Iowa AV Center
Media Library
C-5 Seashore Hall
University of Iowa
Iowa City, IA 52242
319-353-5885

University of Minnesota
Audiovisual Library Service
3300 University Ave. S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55414
612-373-3810

University of Southern California
Film Distribution Center
School of Cinema / Television
University Park
Los Angeles, CA 90089-2212
213-743-2238

Wombat Productions
250 West 57th St.
Suite 916
New York, NY 10019
212-315-2502

Xerox Films
Dist. by Karol Media
625 From Road
Paramus, NJ 07652
201-262-4170